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Dragoon Extra: Songstress

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Extra: Songstress 1

This is a story without much relation to the main plot. It is my hope you enjoy it as a side story where dragoon characters make an appearance.

Down a path buried up by droves of people passed the caravan of gorgeous carriages.

The sky was blue. The scenery colored by fluttering confetti was one to sing praise of a single princess in the largest carriage.

Inside that carriage rode only that single beautiful girl, alongside the young knight that served as her guard.

The cheers buried up the surrounding noises. From inside the carriage, the white dress-clad young girl waved her hand. Her skin was pale and her frail, slender body gave off the impression it might snap in two. And then was her curling blue hair, that could be called her most notable feature.

Her waving, gleaming blue hair grew to around her lower back. As she waved from the window, her hidden left hand gripped her pendant... the item that proved she was of the royal line, a small gold egg-shaped item engraved with the cursed seal of Celestia.

Everyone celebrated the birth of a new shrine maiden, rejoicing as they offered up Princess Cleo Celestia of the Celestia royal line.

With this they'd be safe. They'd be at peace for another few decades. Cleo understood what was on everyone's minds.

In the first place, these cheers and the smiles on the peoples' faces, all of it... was delight over her own sacrifice.

The green-eyed Cleo, under her smile, she wasn't able to think anything. She had been born to do so. Her role had finally come, nothing more, nothing left.

It would be too pitiful for her young little sister. Her brothers wouldn't be able to fulfill the role.

The clan raised as sacrifices would regularly offer up a woman every few

decades. The people would think of them as maidens offered to their guardian god.

Cleo was royalty. But for the peace of the country, she would offer her very life to the protector... How tragic. From the eyes of the people who knew nothing, it looked as if the royal family was fulfilling their obligation.

In truth, royal blood did flow through Cleo's veins. But that blood had been carefully prepared outside the current royalty. Cleo's family was merely being kept alive, a clan of sacrifices royal in name alone. The energy supply of the ancient weapon, that demanded life every few tens of years.

In order to replenish it, Cleo was henceforth set to die.

She would continue on the carriage, making for a mountain on the edge of the continent. She would enter the ruins on that active volcano of a mountain, offer her life to the weapon, and that would be the end of it. Right, that's where it was supposed to end.

Cleo first thought it strange when the carriage stopped at a spot it wasn't planned to stop. When she thought they had run upon some trouble, in the next instant, the surrounding knights acting as guards started charging straight ahead.

And knights gathered around them as well. Wearing white, ceremonial armor, those elites of Celestia bragged that their training and devotion fell not short of the high knights of the large power of Courtois.

"Protect the princess!"

"No matter what, we have to protect her from these bandits."

"Dammit! They were hiding in the crowd!"

Things did not seem to be going very well outside.

"Why did it come to this..."

While Cleo was the surprised, the young knight hung over her.

"Princess, get down! It will be dangerous if an arrow flies our way!"

Even if they tried to run, they were unable to go out into the main street crowded with people. They could only trust in the carriage, built not only pomp,

but sturdy as well.

So following the words of her guard... no, the knight keeping watch over her, Cleo had no choice but to meekly quiver.

The young knight's name was Emilio Balhart. His green hair grew long, and he was a fair knight of Celestia. Called the wonder child of Celestia, once in knight school, he easily changed that name to genius.

Even after enlisting in a brigade, his rumors would all extol him. His service only covered a few year, but it was said he was on the way to becoming knight captain and he was stipulated to be the country's strongest knight.

Many women would envy a position of being protected by him. But thinking to the contrary, that meant there was a need for strong enough surveillance to dispatch such an elite knight.

(Mother...)

Cleo felt the sounds of battle outside gradually grow in intensity, too scared to help it. But while she had lived for nothing more than to be a sacrifice, she hated the thought of dying without fulfilling her role. Otherwise, her young little sister would be offered in her place.

(Just to the ruins... we just had to make it to the altar. Why won't they just let us be?)

To protect the girl on the verge of tears, Emilio, who'd been keeping watch of the outside, let out his voice. Cleo required just a bit of time before she realized that.

"It's dangerous here, princess! We need to withdraw."

"... Eh? We can't, Emilio. The ceremony can't start without me. What's more, if we return come so far, the palace's standing will..."

"Right now, your life is more important, princess! We'll withdraw and reorganize our formation. The carriage ahead's been attacked, so we can't go further in this. We have to go outside."

The carriage in front carried the ceremonial tools. It took quite some time to prepare them. While she didn't want to cast them aside, she saw there was

some sense in Emilio's words and jumped down from the carriage.

Emilio pulled her by the hand, and as they left the carriage, the street buried in cheers had changed to the intense sounds of battle. Outside, she could hear even more noises that rung through her ears. Alongside the din of clashing metal, the sensation of magic being fired off.

Cleo wanted to hurry from the spot. She didn't feel sorry for the surrounding knights, for this was their job. And her own job meant for her to offer her life.

She told herself so as she fled with Emilio who pulled her down the way. In their way, a man who had likely slipped into the crowd held a weapon in hand as he came at them. Emilio pulled his sword to knock it from his hand.

"Stand down, ruffian!"

For now, perhaps prioritizing their escape, Emilio sprinted into the gap between buildings on the main road without landing the finishing blow. Cleo had never been somewhere like that before. Unlike the main streets, an unpleasant smell wafted about.

At the same time, there was trash littered around the place making it difficult to run.

"Princess, just a little further."

"I'm sorry, Emilio. I've caused you nothing but trouble..."

As Emilio continued running through the small spaces between buildings, he looked to Cleo like a reliable knight. When she had no idea where she was and she had even started to forget which way they'd gone, Emilio continued proceeding on.

He turned a right, and next a left. He ran down the stairs.

Once he left the narrow path, a small river was flowing. A different terrible smell came from there. It was the smell of a drain.

"This might be harsh on you, princess, but this is all to get away."

"I know. I don't intend to fixate on these trivial matters."

Thinking Leo's hand would let her get away, as the sounds of battle grew

distance, Cleo found a little of her composure. If an ally appeared here, she would have more peace of mind. But it seemed the ones who appeared were no allies.

“It’s a dead end this way.”

Just as they tried to cross the bridge, they were pincerred in the front and back. Unlike the ones who had slipped in with the people, the men this time wore robes with swords hung at their waists. From the leisure with which they held themselves, they likely thought they would win if they pressed through with numbers.

Three in the front, and two in the back.

Cleo gave Emilio’s hand one strong squeeze before letting go. Emilio shifted the sword he held in one hand to a two-handed grip.

“Princess, leave this to me.”

“I’m counting on you, Emilio.”

If it was Emilio, even called Celestia’s strongest knight, then he would be able to break through this dilemma. Cleo believed so.

The robed men drew their swords. Emilio took a stance as well. Protecting Cleo in the center of the bridge, he kept wary of foes on both sides.

... It was at that moment.

“Princesssss!”

It wasn’t elite knights but soldiers who rushed to their aid. The robed men clicked their tongues before running away.

“We’re saved, Emilio.”

Relieved, Cleo called over to Emilio. But Emilio didn’t look so optimistic. His grip on his sword remained firm as he glared at the soldiers rushing over.

(Has the enemy donned a disguise?)

She felt awkward, doubting the soldiers who rushed to their aid, but if Emilia didn’t let his guard down, she thought she would imitate.

The soldiers noticed they were being suspected and hurriedly stowed their

weapons.

“We’re, um... we’ve been assigned to guard the small gate beyond this point. We’re on break right now, and we’d gone to the main road. Wanted to catch a glimpse of the princess off to the ritual. So anyway, we saw the princess and companion running and hurriedly rushed to your aid. My apologies.”

The city was surrounded by walls, and apart from the main gate for standard use, there were other gates one could pass through. The sluice gate to let in the river water fit that description. There were a number of small gates, and in order to protect them, there were usually soldiers permanently stationed.

But it wasn’t the sort place knights were deployed. If anything happened, they could seal the gates at a moment’s notice, so such places were occupied by hired soldiers.

Cleo looked over their equipment and saw the plating the gatekeepers wore around their waists.

The large leaderish man boasted an unshaven face and looked especially wild. The slender man with the spear looked to be in ill health and somewhat unreliable. For the small fat man, a portion of his stomach even stuck out of the provided equipment.

The men looked suspicious by all accounts, but they were looking at them apologetically. As Emilio stepped out front, knights and soldiers began to appear behind them.

“Found them!”

“Really!?”

“It’s true. They really survived!”

One of the knights who raced over was one of Cleo’s guards. Seeing his face, she felt truly relieved. The small, fat man spoke with just a bit of pride.

“Hmhmhm, I thought this would happen, so I called out to the soldiers. I drew arrows on the wall along the way, making sure they could get here no problem. I mean, we got lost the hell of it.”

“Not bad, soldier!”

“It’s true. You did good, kid!”

The unshaven man and the tall man praised the small one. Seeing that, Cleo was at a loss for words. But it was certain they were allies. Holding up his sword, Emilio spoke.

“Looks like it’s alright.”

“Yes. It does seem they’re on our side. I was one step away from cutting them.”

Sheathing away his sword, Emilio looked at the three-man soldier party.

“Yes, I’m truly glad it never came to that.”

A relieved Cleo was led right off towards the palace, protected by knights and soldiers. When she returned to the main road that had been suppressed, the knights had walked following the arrows the plump man drew. Looking back at the path she had rushed down too fast, the maze-like back alleys and the smells made her head spin. All the tensions she had never felt before had been put off until that moment.

There, the man in charge muttered apologetically.

“My apologies, princess. It’s about the ceremonial tools, but they were destroyed in the attack. A bolt of magic struck the carriage directly, and they’ve all been rendered impossible to use.”

Which meant the ceremony couldn’t be held. The tools prepared specifically for that day were lost, and Cleo lamented she would be unable to fulfill her duty. When she had been born to fulfill her role, that was no longer possible.

“There can be no helping it. I’m sure father will prepare a replacement at once. We must exercise patience.”

On Cleo’s words, the knights made vexed faces as well. They couldn’t fulfill their role. You could call it natural. Within all of that, Emilio along made a disgruntled expression.



In the royal palace of the Kingdom of Courtois, three knights temporarily recalled from the outer reaches showed their faces at the office of the knight brigade they were affiliated with.

Self-proclaimed charmer in his prime Captain Oldart gave a smile before those three. His gaze was mainly directed at the good Major Bennet. A female knight of the wolf tribe, and tamer of a water dragon, she was the highest-ranking officer of the three.

“Yeah, good work on your mission in the outer reaches, Major Bennet.”

“Sir! It is an honor.”

Enthusiastic about her work, Bennet boasted a short status and cute appearance, but sticking her chest out, she gave a splendid salute. The captain shifted his eyes to the side to look at the remaining two.

The first was Lieutenant Keith. Similar to Bennet, he was a dragoon who rode a water dragon, but the captain didn't want to get too involved with him, so he gave a vague compliment.

“Ah, Keith, you did alri—”

“Your words are too much for me! To convey my greatest delight, today let the two of us—”

“And finally Rudel.”

Cutting Keith off early, Oldart finally looked at the real target, Rudel. The knight who rode a white dragon... a future archduke, a young man with both status and fame. Even within the elite dragoon brigade, he was considerably conspicuous.

From the moment of his enlistment, he kept creating legends, and he was a troublesome young man some called the new legacy. Of silver hair and blue eyes, he looked at the captain as a child would.

“Rudel... it's that. You need to work a little harder.”

“Why is that!?”

From Oldart's personal reasons, his evaluation of Rudel was low. As Rudel fell into a slump, Bennet called over to him.

“Rudel, you're before the captain. Stick out your chest. If you're displeased with your evaluation, then put in the effort to change it. You've no time to be down. What matters is results.”

On Bennet's words, Rudel nodded and straightened his back. There, Bennet nodded as well.

"That's right."

Seeing that relation of superior and subordinate, Oldart spoke to Rudel.

"This is why I hate you!"

The scene of the dragoon's idol-esque existence Bennet being kind on her subordinate Rudel was one Oldart couldn't bring himself to accept. From her... from Bennet's lovable appearance, she was a valuable existence doted on by subordinate and superior alike.

(And I'll tell you, the form of Bennet-chan fidgeting nervously after a subordinate calls her cute is the cutest!)

He was that sort of terrible captain, but he cut the jokes there. In order to talk about work, he pulled an envelope from his desk drawer. In it detailed a mission that wasn't thought to be particularly important.

"Now then, that's all for the jokes. I'm changing the subject, but Rudel, a separate mission has been prepared for you."

"Why is that!?"

"That's terrible, captain!"

This time Bennet and Keith raised their voices. Oldart breathed out a sigh as he continued on. Bennet didn't want her ideal subordinate Rudel to leave. Keith... after thinking that far, Oldart shifted his thoughts.

"I told you, I'm not joking. This isn't a long term mission. You know of the country of Celestia we've tied an alliance with? We were told to prepare a dragoon guard for them."

Placing the envelope on the table, Oldart produced a paper from it. On it, the details of the incident in Celestia were written out. Rudel accepted the paper and made a conflicted face.

"Based on what's written, isn't it bad for them to use a knight from another country?"

Oldart waved his left hand dismissively as he answered.

“With the attack, there’s the civilians’ feelings, you see. They want to give the image that they’ve pulled in a dragoon and they’re working him to the bone. This is getting political, but it would be troublesome for Courtois if a small country dragged on past matters forever. Since it’s come to that, they’re sending in the flashy you and Sakuya to show them how much better we are! Or so the higher ups are thinking. Also, this and that happened, concerning the result, it would be better if we dispatched someone.”

When it came to politics, Rudel had too little information to work with to make a decision, so he stuck the papers under his arm and gave a salute. Oldart was relieved Rudel hadn’t declined the mission. If he did, with that dubious title of future archduke, it would spell trouble.

In that regards, it was a real help he was diligent in his work. While he joke about lowering Rudel’s evaluation, he was rightly evaluating Rudel’s work in itself. Even when flown off to borderland, he knew he was working hard in his duties and the region’s development.

From Oldart’s point of view, if only his status was removed, he’d be a proficient subordinate.

“But captain, Rudel has designated overseers.”

Bennet brought up Rudel’s overseers... the ones who followed him under the name of special inspectors, causing Oldart to recall those two female knights.

“Ah, those girls. Take them along, why don’t you. No, definitely take them along. I’m anxious with Rudel alone.”

“... If you’re worried, should I go too? Even if I look like this, I’m more knowledgeable on etiquette than some foreign woman and elf woman.”

When Oldart said he was worried, Keith stepped into the conversation. He got the feeling there was some wrath included in the ‘woman’ portion, and that was likely not his imagination.

However...

“Rejected. I can’t send you into an important allied country. Good grief.”

To Oldart’s exasperation, Keith was moved. Just how do you misinterpret that

in a way so convenient to you, Oldart looked at Keith's expression and thought.

"Captain, you want me by your side so b—"

"Wrong! Don't get any closer!"

Oldart grew angry for real, and standing from his chair, he put his back against the window as he cried out. Both Rudel and Bennet looked over the two in wonder. But it was a mission, so Rudel looked over the contents of the documents once more. Perhaps Bennet thought the conversation was done as well, as she strayed over Rudel's side and confirmed the contents.

"If they're sending my subordinate, they'll need my signature."

"You're right. There's a line for your signature, Major. It's all yours."

"Quite right. Because I'm your commanding officer!"

Seeing Bennet rejoice over the words commanding officer, Oldart felt healed as he tried to do something about this situation with a dangerous individual closing in.

"Oy, Keith, don't cross that line!"

"Isn't it fine, captain? Just look over there, this is all part of superior, subordinate communication!"

"You fool, stay back!"

Oldart's office was quite chaotic.

Extra: Songstress 2

Racing down the main road of the capital was a young man known as the black knight.

“Pardon me!”

Leaping over a cart pulled by an old man, he changed directions as he landed, desperately running off. Mindful of his back, he looked around and decided the direction he should run.

His curly blond hair flowed back as he ran. His mismatched eyes were a beautiful sight to behold, blue in the right and green in the left. His well-trained body acted as a spring, letting him bound freely over the main road. But what he made use of wasn't his physical body alone.

By channeling mana into his body, he was enhancing it. Desperate enough to use every means at his disposal to flee, whenever he'd passed by a woman's side, his Jetstream would flip their skirts. Whenever he was about to run into someone, it was always a young girl or a pretty older woman.

“Like hell I'll stop here!!”

Shouting as if his soul was crying out, Aleist didn't even try to peer into the flipped skirt. He continued avoiding all the young girls in his way with magnificent footwork.

They would call him ‘That harem bastard,’ with envy, jealousy, resentment.

But from the point of view of the man in question, that wasn't a result he obtained because he wanted it. Aleist understood that a harem was a special privilege only granted to the chosen few. That didn't mean to say assets or strength. What was most important was what could be called the qualifications to keep a harem.

... and the power to maintain that harem, even when surrounded.

You can be dense as hell. You can pretend you don't see. Even lucky perverts are permitted. But you mustn't run away. A man with the caliber to accept all

harem members... meaning a main character's disposition.

Aleist lacked that.

Before that even came into question...

"Don't run away, Aleist-sama!"

"What is the meaning of this, captain Aleist!"

"That should be our line. We're his fiancées! And yet he goes on a trip with nothing but women? Fat chance!"

The women chasing him from behind were catching up, even when he ran at full force. There were those running in skirts, and those riding horses to give chase. A majority of them were knights who had graduated the academy, the Courtois Kingdom's educational institute, while the others were women who possessed equal power.

Aleist endured the cold eyes directed at him by the surrounding men as he screamed from his heart.

"No, I already have someone my heart's set on!"

But the world was full of uncertainty.

"If you're a noble, just give it up!"

"In the first place, that girl you're after doesn't think anything of you!"

"Aleist, just give up!"

Noble ladies, knights and those of the beast tribe, various sorts of women chased after Aleist. It was a dream many a young boy had dreamed of. But Aleist's heart was set on another. An elf girl called Millia.

Yet the one he loved would never chase him, he was the one giving chase. What's more, his rival was more than up to par.

The white knight Rudel. He knew that man didn't think anything special of Millia, but even so, Millia had not given up on him. To Aleist, it was quite a sorrowful thing.

The fact Rudel was his close friend only made their relationship more dubious. Even so, Aleist didn't give up.

"Like hell I'll give uppp!!!"

There was no telling what they'd do to him if he was captured. Imagining them making sure he could no longer run away, Aleist raced down the main road. It was at that moment. As he entered an alley off the street where the paths grew a little complicated, Aleist was grasped.

The one who caught him was a blue haired underclassman from his student days... one of his fiancées.

(Ah, it's over. Farewell, my innocence.)

Aleist's expression had already given up on everything.

It was Nate. Her curling blue hair grew to her back. Her pale skin and eyes the same blue as her hair were exceptionally beautiful. Her meeting with Aleist had been at the graduate sendoff party, an outrageous encounter where she ended up on top of him. But without Aleist having the slightest idea of what was going on, she had become engaged to him.

"How troubling, senpai."

Nate grasped Aleist, smiling gently as she made a plea. You could call it a bargain.

"I have just a small request, but if you'll grant it, I'll save you here and now."

"W-what is it? I'm not giving you my body!"

"That does sound appealing, but this time's different. Well, you could call it a problem with my house, or perhaps something of the sort... there's a place I want you to go with me. Of course, if you'll go then I'll save you, and I won't lay a hand on you."

Aleist cowered from the sound of the approaching footsteps, thinking a little before giving a nod.

(If that's all it takes, it's a cheap buy.)

He thought and nodded, but that would turn out a tremendous mistake.

"Very well, then wait a moment."

Nate walked out of the alley, in a theatrical voice, proclaiming to the pursuing women where Aleist had run off to.

“Big trouble! Senpai leapt over that building and went that way!”

“Good work, Nate!”

“Don’t let him get away, find him!”

“If that’s where he went, I can use some friends from the knight brigades to encircle him!”

(I’m scared. They’re scaring me. Let’s learn to be just a little more graceful, ladies...)

Once everyone had left under Nate’s deception, she beckoned to him. Aleist left the alleyway, relieved he had been saved.

“You really saved my back there.”

“You don’t need to thank me. Because you’ll be properly working in exchange. Yeah, now that I know you’re going to help me out, that’s a huge load off my shoulders.”

Nate pat her chest in relief. And Aleist recalled he had never asked for the destination.

“Come to think of it, where are we going?”

“Ah, about that... it’s the Kingdom of Celestia. My House flowed in from there, and there’s been a bit of a request made to us this time around, so I have to make the trip. I really am relieved you’re coming with me. I mean, one wrong step and we’d have an international incident on our hands. No, perhaps bigger than that?”

“... Eh?”

Before a delighted Nate, Aleist’s understanding was unable to catch up.



The air passage from Courtois to Celestia was, to the five of them, a fresh experience.

Flying through the open sky was a white dragon with four wings. Its body was a size larger than the normal wild dragon. With the size of its body and wings, its arms were also thick and burly. But if you said such a thing, you would hurt that young maiden of a dragon.

Among the dragoons, the most famous knight's partner... riding Sakuya's back, Izumi Shirasagi's ponytail flowed in the breeze. Her silky hair swayed to and fro. Normally, the gale would be much worse, but the barrier erected with magic protected the five on the dragon's back.

Hailing from a foreign region called the orient, Izumi was a beauty of black hair and black eyes. She was once Rudel's classmate and a person who understood him well.

More than friends, less than lovers, both sides accepted that.

At present, while being enlisted in a knight brigade of elites called the high knights, she was granted the position of special inspector to keep an eye on Rudel-who caused problem after problem. They were going to a foreign nation this time around, so she wore the blue knight clothing worn by high knights. Her chest was large enough to force up her clothes, and at times eyes of envy were concentrated on her.

"The kingdom of Celestia is a small nation. I've only ever read about it in books, so I'm somewhat looking forward to it."

When Izumi said that, the girl of long green hair beside her muttered disinterestedly. Differing from humans, her ears stretched a great deal. A woman with the characteristic ears of the elves... Millia looked towards Rudel with her green eyes.

Izumi had said she couldn't take on the role of special inspector alone, and by calling to her fellow alumni Millia, Millia also became one of Rudel's inspectors. Note, her modest chest was never the target of any envious eyes.

"It's that place with the large volcano, right? I'm surprised people are able to live in such a place. It seems pointless, or perhaps even admirable."

Millia's statement was answered by the overly serious Rudel.

"It's true it's an active volcano, but while I don't know how, it's a country that somehow controls the volcano. And because they're close to a volcano, the hot springs are famous. It seems the land's suited for growing fruit. Courtois also imports its fruit wines, haven't you ever drunk it before?"

"There's no way any of us have ever tasted the sort of wine you drink, Rudel."

Averting her eyes from Rudel, after spitting some cynicism she shut her mouth. She did seem to have a nature that couldn't be honest with itself, and Izumi could only think that was doing nothing but harm to her as she gave a bitter smile.

“But this is a surprise. I thought you'd return to the outer reaches at once, Rudel.”

In order to change the subject, Izumi recalled the contents of this time's special mission. To summarize, by sending an especially conspicuous dragoon, they were to show the dignity of Courtois. There may have been political motivations behind it, and Izumi worried whether Rudel would be against those sorts of things.

Their job on the outskirts wasn't over yet. Despite that, they alone were carrying out such a decorative mission. As long as it was an order, she knew he would accept it, but she worried what he would be thinking underneath.

The man seemed quite enthusiastic to be heading off on a mission. But at Izumi's question, he made just a bit of a troubled face.

“... I want you to keep this from Sakuya, but she got real worked up when I told her we were going to do a special mission. See, last time we did something big, she had to keep house... as long as Sakuya's happy, it can't be too bad. Even if it's just at the level of an errand.”

An outrageous reason. Rather than the importance of the mission itself, he took it up to dote on his dragon. Hearing that, Millia breathed a sigh as she spoke.

“You're the same dragon idiot as ever.”

Izumi touched the white back beneath her as she smiled.

At times, the dragon would let out a resounding roar. To Izumi who could hear the thoughts she transmitted, she could tell that was a happy roar. Her appearance was that of a dragon much too splendid, Sakuya was a child born not a few years ago.

She was often judged on her appearance but was still a child who needed to be looked after.

‘Special mission! Sakuya is strong! Sakuya is cool!’

Sakuya sung as she flew through the sky, and Izumi and Rudel watched her with smiles. A subspecies of gaia dragon that lived in the earth, Sakuya wasn’t skilled at flying. Her movement speed was much lower than the average dragon. But this was a laid back mission. They had parted from the occasionally hectic border, and Izumi felt these sorts of missions weren’t bad from time to time.

She turned towards the envious gaze coming from Nate.

“So what sort of business do the two of you have with the Kingdom of Celestia? As I recall, the decree just said we have to accompany you there and back, but...”

Before their departure, with an official decree from an organization called the defenders, came Nate and another individual. Aleist looking at Millia recalled how Nate had told them at the last minute they would be riding as well. In the midst of their busy departure, they accepted the decree and let them right on.

They were well acquainted, and they intended to confirm the paperwork while in the sky.

“Ah, you don’t have to pay it any mind. While you’re at it, I do recommend you pluck those things off your che... ow!”

As Nate envied her ample bosom with a smile, Aleist hit her on the back of the head.

“M-my apologies, Izumi-san! This girl has absolutely no breasts, so she gets jealous of those with a large chest.”

Aleist followed through for her. You’re not supposed to say that, or so Izumi only grew more worried. For the one on Aleist’s mind Millia was a modest one on the opposite side of the spectrum from Izumi.

When Izumi looked at Millia, she saw a vein popping out on her forehead.

(Ah, this is that pattern of failure.)

Izumi looked at Rudel to find him humming along to Sakuya’s song. He likely had no interest. Before she could become collateral damage, Izumi moved to

Rudel's side and listened attentively to Sakuya and Rudel's tune.

'You're strong, Sakuya. Amazing, Sakuya! All~ The enemies go down in one blow!'

"Yeah, Sakuya, you're the best!"

Looking at Rudel and Sakuya, Izumi chose not to lend an ear to the fight going on behind them.

"Well excuse me! I'm sorry for having such a small chest!"

"You're wrong, Millia! Rather than large, I prefer a more reserved one!"

"Then that means I'm senpai's type! Millia-senpai, being flat isn't bad you know. Those lumps of fat are only ever in the way."

"When someone so envious of them says it, you've got no persuasive power!"

"You're wrong, both of you! What's important is balance, and size isn't every—"

"Come to think of it, Senpai, your big sister was stacked, wasn't she?"

"Why are you sending such a pitiful glance at my chest!?"

"Nate! Don't go there! You shouldn't touch on that one!"

"Aleist, so you were thinking it too! That's right, in the end, I've got nothing! Even when my sister's stacked, they always say!"

"... I know I'm not one to speak, but Senpai, you're a little off there."

Izumi ignored the quarrel behind her, but perhaps Rudel grew curious as he turned around. Looking at the circumstances of their argument, he made a face as if he didn't understand.

"... Izumi, what exactly did Aleist do wrong?"

Seeing Rudel tilt his head, Izumi shook her own. To be completely honest, Aleist's mistakes were beyond count. When he had a girl he liked, bringing a different woman along was yet another one of those mistakes.

(Ah... he was wrong from the very start. Well, whatever.)

Giving up, Izumi only prayed Rudel wouldn't turn out like Aleist.

"No, if you don't understand, then that's fine. Just stay the way you are, Rudel. That way, you'll reduce the casualties around."

The honest Rudel didn't understand but nodded anyway.

“I-I see. I’ll do my best.”

Seeing Rudel fail to comprehend, Izumi was relieved. He loved dragons so much he had little interest in anything else. But he had a status as a future archduke, and he had obtained a standing as a dragoon, the knights called the heroes of Courtois. It would be stranger if there were no women around her.

In truth, many women approached him with affection, but with his status and dragoon position, he declined their association. He always made it clear when it came to those things, a relief to Izumi.

... The reason she didn’t go out with him was also such a problem of status.

“These sorts of missions aren’t bad.”

Looking over the lively three, Rudel spoke. Izumi was in agreement.

“Right. A carefree trip through the sky isn’t bad at all. But Rudel, this is a mission in a foreign land, so you must exercise caution. In umm... various things.”

Celestia was an allied nation, and she fretted over whether he might cause an incident. Rudel nodded with a smile.

“Leave it to me. It’s not like I intend to cause any problems.”

‘Sakuya is fine too, Izumi!’

Hearing Rudel and Sakuya’s responses, Izumi gave a warm smile and thought.

(Now I’m worried.)

They were responses that didn’t give her the slightest peace of mind.



Emilio walked irritantly down a corridor in Celestia castle.

(Dammit! It’s because that useless king relies on other countries...)

He had been notified that Celestia had requested the dispatch of a dragoon from its allied nation Courtois. The details that the knight brigades were all rounded up to hear were little more than a proclamation those knights weren’t trusted.

But there was something more than that Emilio couldn’t forgive.

(The plan went amiss. I have to do something...)

Thinking back, the mistake came with that party of three. Gathered in order to protect a gate that held no particular value, they were hoodlums, soldiers in name alone. But perhaps their awareness along was high, as despite their paltry wages, they had risked their lives to give chase.

(When they're lower than the mercenaries hired to make up for numbers, my plan was...)

To add onto that, those hoodlums were following behind Emilio. All three were smiling. On top of the shoddy armor they were granted, they wore even shoddier medals granted to them for saving the princess.

What's more, by that they rose in rank to be official soldiers.

Celestia was not a large nation. For that sake, they prepared elites as knights, but when it came to soldiers, they were only gathered for the numbers. Normally, it was the knights who would carry out the mission. It was a country with few troops, but there was a reason for that.

In that past, Celestia was at war with the large power of Courtois. And as Courtois invaded with their dragoons as the main shaft, the god of the volcano revered as the country's protector repelled them. It was an event of about eighty years prior.

(Clinging onto past glory forever, it's because they worship something like that as a god, that this country is ruined!)

From then on, the people of Celestia were convinced that they were a people protected by god. For that sake, the notion the military might be unnecessary spread like the plague.

While being a small nation, they maintained an equal relation with Courtois... no, one wrong step taken and they'd be made light of, and that was largely due to these sorts of occurrences.

And come so far, the failure of the knight brigade was doing its work. Because the ceremonial articles were lost, it would take some time before the ceremony could restart. Irrelevant to the populace, the crowd or the castle, that dissatisfaction was directed at the knights.

The knight brigades remained in order to maintain public order, but in the attack on the princess, the populace began to hold their doubts. For that sake, the royals and nobles had an allied nation send in a dragoon, mainly to send a message.

When Emilio thought of just how much incompetence that showed, it irritated him to no ends.

(Because of that inept top brass, this country is...)

Once he had thought that far, a voice called to him from behind. IT was the party of three.

The unshaven large man was Ben. The tall slender man was Pono. The short and plump man was Passan. With splendid smiles, the three of them called Emilio...

“What’s wrong, captain?”

“Keeping it bottled up isn’t good for your body, captain.”

“If you’re hungry, let’s go to the cafeteria, captain.”

When he thought of how this lot had gotten in the way of his plan, Emilio was filled with a feeling of helplessness.

“...Y-you guys...”

He held his head. Just where did he go wrong? The soldiers who protected Cleo were now stationed as Emilio’s subordinates. This was something even Emilio, heralded as a genius couldn’t predict. Of course, Emilio understood full well he was no genius.

He wasn’t average. He was just a little talented.

(Why did my plan go so awry? I won’t say it was perfect, but even so, I spent a long time preparing.)

Emilio’s head began to hurt.

... But even so, he didn’t give up.

(I can still correct it. Somehow the princess... the princess, with these hands...)

Emilio’s sharp eyes still hadn’t given up.

He suddenly heard a rowdy voice from inside the castle. At the ruckus, the party of three looked inquisitively at Emilio.

“... Let’s go check it out.”



Their flight over, Rudel’s party descended into Celestia.

“We’re a little earlier than scheduled.”

At the designated landing point, the soldiers and knight platoons who caught wind of the ruckus were beginning to race in. Taking on the shape of a fortress city, the capital had a splendid castle erected in the center.

While the troops entered and gathered, they wouldn’t approach. It was only natural. There weren’t many men brave enough to see Sakuya and think to challenge her.

But while they tried to land at the spot they’d been scheduled for, it was too small for Sakuya. Carefully maneuvering her into that space, Rudel praised her.

“Well done, Sakuya.”

‘Praise me, praise me! Praise me more!’

When Sakuya wagged her tail in delight, Izumi cautioned her.

“Rudel, put a stop to Sakuya’s tail. At this rate, there will be collateral damage. This isn’t Courtois. If you break too many things, it will cause a huge problem.”

Hearing that, Rudel immediately soothed Sakuya and calmed her down before dismounting her back. But there, Nate began to lead Aleist off somewhere.

“Ah, well then, we’ve got our own mission to deal with.”

“Wait, mission? Eh!?”

Watching Nate pull Aleist off by the hand, Rudel grew anxious as he found out the man hadn’t seemed to have confirmed the contents of his own mission. At the same time, he was curious just what sort of mission it might be.

(I guess It’s got nothing to do with me. You do your best, Aleist.)

While Rudel waved his hand at his friend, Aleist cried something out.

“You said it was personal! Where did that official decree come from!? Hey, are you listening!?”

“You’re being noisy, senpai! When you’ve come so far, just resolve yourself! It’s fine, the decree is the real deal... its origin point is just a little dubious.”

“As I thought!”

Rudel’s worries only grew, but this was Aleist’s problem so he decided to leave them be. He just sought some confirmation with Izumi.

“Izumi, Aleist’s decree was genuine, wasn’t it?”

“There’s no doubt about it. Though it was a little suspicious.”

While Rudel and Izumi lost themselves in thought, Millia in her defenders uniform looked at the entrance of the plaza and spoke.

“Guys, looks like our welcome party is here.”

“Now then, let’s execute the mission. You two stay behind me. You’re supposed to act as my attendants, after all.”

As Izumi and Millia nodded, Rudel got his specially-made white knight uniform in order as he waited for an envoy of Celestia to arrive.

Extra: Songstress 3

Once the bureaucratic paperwork was in order, to receive a simple explanation of the situation, Rudel's party scheduled an audience with royalty... with the current king Barqah Celestia.

But the only one who could attend was Rudel.

The reason was a discriminatory one, and a decision by Celestia that a Courtois non-native like Izumi and a demi-human like Millia were unworthy of the meeting.

Within the flurried palace interior, Rudel was kept waiting in the waiting room. Knights left to watch over him stationed nearby, Rudel read through the documents from Celestia's side.

"... I don't think there will be a problem guarding Princess Cleo on the way to the volcano, but protecting her throughout two days before departure will be difficult for me alone."

The contents denoted were orders for Rudel to serve as Cleo's guard. With the other party being the princess of a foreign country, Rudel felt there was a limit to how far he could accompany her over a course of two days. The bath, bathroom, changing and such, it would be embarrassing for a man to be by her side.

Rudel had already been kept waiting over an hour for his audience. Within all that, Millia sat in a chair as she sipped tea. While she looked calm, perhaps she was irritated within, as she sent some glances towards the knights stationed around.

"I get why you're the only one who gets an audience, but aren't they treating us too terribly? And there's a bit of a problem relying on a foreign knight to protect the precious princess."

Millia's words afforded her glares from the knights. Izumi sipped her tea calmly.

"I'm sure Celestia has some preparations of its own. And we did arrive quite

ahead of schedule.”

“There’s a limit to that. And even if it’s an audience, he’s just meeting in the king’s office, isn’t he? I don’t want to say it, but Rudel’s a future archduke. They’re treating him too lightly.”

Millia’s anger could be called natural. There was no helping if the country made light of them. When it came to keeping Rudel waiting, they recognized it as a foreign diplomacy tactic. But they also knew it was a measure to be taken against those of lower status.

The small country of Celestia boasted less land than Rudel’s own home.

There was an active volcano close to the fortress city, with some towns and villages dotted around. The national population didn’t reach a million.

There were hot springs around, and accepting travelers, they were in possession of assets in foreign currencies. The fruit juice that made up their specialty product was widely exported. It was certain these lands were livelier than the Arses territory governed by Rudel’s parents.

But they depended on a foreign knight. They took an attitude as if to pick a fight with a major power. It wasn’t strange at all to think they were going beyond their reach.

“... For now, I have come on a mission as a single knight. I don’t think they’re treating me lightly. But more than that, the princess’ guard detail will be a problem. I can’t follow her to the bath or changing room.”

“Can’t Celestia dispatch some female knights?”

On Millia’s arbitrary statement, Rudel shook his head.

“Unfortunately, there are no female knights in Celestia. No soldiers either.”

Different countries had different customs. The female knights that were gradually becoming natural in Courtois were nothing but heresy here. Rudel thought the reason for the limited audience was also related to those customs.

Women were not permitted to enter the restricted class of knights. There were other small countries around Courtois, but even among them, Celestia was special.

(This is a troublesome mission. I guess I'll try negotiation.)

Thinking it would be difficult to serve as the only guard, Rudel decided he'd ask for Izumi's cooperation in the case that Celestia hadn't made any preparations of their own.

A butlerish man appeared in the waiting room.

"Rudel Arses-dono. The preparations are in order, so I shall be guiding you to the King's office."

Leaving the documents and standing to his feet, Rudel straightened his uniform as he walked off. Izumi and Millia sent him a look, so he gave a light nod.



His entry into the king's office permitted, Rudel offered his greetings to King Barqah, taking a break in the room.

But the King didn't turn his body towards him.

(Hmm. It's just as the captain said. This isn't the attitude of a small nation...)

With Rudel's position, he couldn't stick his mouth into political decisions. And once Rudel finished his greetings and got to his feet, Barqah took the cup left on his break table in hand.

"I wish to speak some with him. Have the others stand down."

On his words, the knights and servants stationed took their leave. Sensing them on standby outside the room, Rudel waited for Barqah's words.

He took a glance at the king's extravagant work desk.

It was piled with six whole mountains of documents.

"My apologies. Because that daughter of mine got attacked, I'm busier than you could believe. Originally, I wanted to use the audience chamber, but even now, the authorities who hold antipathy towards Courtois are not few in numbers."

(The princess is treated as a 'that'? I don't feel I'll come to like this person...)

The antipathy surely referred to the war eighty years past. But Rudel felt

rather than antipathy, this was something closer to contempt.

And he didn't like how the man referred to his daughter. Barqah sent his gaze above the fireplace, not in use for seasonal reasons. It was furnished by three separate professional paintings of what seemed to be his family.

From the documents received in Courtois. The first depicted Barqah's queen and children. The second, a woman with blue hair, and two small children... that one was placed in the center. It was bigger than the other two.

And the third along, Rudel found unnatural. It looked to be a painting of Barqah in his younger days. His right hand rested on a woman of blue hair. The king was positioned in the center, making his left side seem strangely desolate.

(It looks like someone's been taken out. But that's the best smile the king's shown of the three.)

"... They're paintings of my family. The precious family I'm supposed to protect. Now, we can't stay like this forever. Let's talk about work, Dragoon."

His bright green hair straight and long, Barqah stroked his beard, making a serious face to talk about work. In his early thirties, the king could be classified as young, but his dignified air was well-formed.

"I have gone over the documents. I accept the guard mission. But I think it will be difficult for me to guard the princess alone."

"Fret not. I will be dispatching people as well."

"But all of your guards are male, are they not? I believe it in your best interest to send around a trustworthy woman."

"... Unfortunately, I have no woman who could serve as a guard."

"I have come here accompanied by one High Knight and one defender. Would it be possible for them to take part in this mission?"

"Hmm. You may do as you wish. Personally, I have no problems as long as the departure takes place in two days. The ceremonial tools should be in order by tomorrow."

"You have my gratitude. And what will our schedule be for this two-day period? It was not detailed in the documents."

Barqah stopped stroking his beard, gazing out of the window.

“I decided to give that one free time. It’s her last after all. For now, she should be spending it with her younger brothers and sisters, but this is an important period. I’d like to avoid time with her family wavering her resolve. If it will let you divide them, then I mind not if you listen to that one’s wishes.”

Rudel thought over what the reason might be for treating the princess of his own country... his daughter like this. He heard she would be offered as a sacrifice. Taking that into consideration, it wouldn’t be strange if he already had his feelings sorted out in his heart.

After that, Rudel was told to hear the specifics from the knights on guard detail and was excused from the room. When he left, Barqah called over.

“Dragoon. That one is a pitiful girl. You must protect her.”
“... Leave it to me.”

Rudel couldn’t determine whether that was his heart speaking or not.
(I’ve taken on quite a troublesome mission.)

He thought of it as a mission to regain Sakuya’s spirits, but ever since he arrived at the palace, he was struck by many a strange feeling.



Taking Izumi and Millia along, Rudel made for the plaza where Sakuya was stationed.

There, those of the royal line... the royal children were watched over by knights as they studied the dragon. Sakuya looked at the children with a tilt of her head.

“Big!”
“Sister, is this a dragon? But our god is stronger, right?”
“Turn this way, you big lunk!”

The child who spat those last words really didn’t understand the amazingness of a dragon, or so Rudel was filled with sorrowful sentiment.

(Good grief, if I had just a day, I’d drill a dragon’s splendor into his body.)
“R-Rudel. Your eyes are scary.”

With Millia's worries, Rudel reverted his glare and approached the woman surrounded by knights. The reason the knights gave such harsh looks must've been because their jobs were snatched away. Rudel thought as she approached the woman.

"Pardon my intrusion. My name is Rudel Arses. On this occasion, I have been ordered to accompany Princess Cleo as a guard."

Giving a drilled Courtois-styled salute, Rudel looked at the surrounding children. Two blue-haired women. Apart from them, a green-haired and brown haired child. They looked older than he had seen them in the paintings.

The woman in her later teens... Cleo let her hand part from her younger sister of similar hair color and countenance to give a curtsy.

"I am greatly delighted by Courtois' assistance in this matter. You have my thanks for taking up my guard."

She smiled. It was hard to imagine she would lose her life in two days.

(Is this... resolve?)

Rudel took caution in his words as he lightly exchanged conversation with the princess. He also introduced Izumi and Millia who were standing back.

"Are they female knights of Courtois? And the defenders? My apologies. I am none too knowledgeable on the affairs of Courtois."

"That's perfectly alright. The defenders are an organization only set up recently. There's no helping if someone of foreign lands has yet to hear of them."

Rudel dealt with her as he recalled the painting in the king's office. A majority of the children here had been painted. But the one individual who had been kept out... he noticed it was Cleo.

(Is this that family... no, national circumstance thing?)

Knowing he wouldn't be able to dig too deep into it, Rudel conversed with her.

"Even so, to think dragons were something so large. It's the first I've ever seen one, but I'm surprised how white and beautiful it is."

"She praised me! Rudel, she praised me!"

The one whose body twitched in response was Cleo. Perhaps those around could only see it as a roar, as the knights stood in formation before the royal line. From Rudel's point of view, it could be nothing more than a cry of delight.

"She's just happy to be praised. But you've got a good eye on you, Cleo-sama. Even among the dragons, this girl is an especially cute one, and her name's Sakuya. See, the blue gemstone in her forehead's pretty, isn't it? And when she spreads out all four wings, no one can take their eyes off of..."

"Rudel. Rudel! You're troubling the princess!"

Izumi immediately suppressed Rudel's mania, causing him to repent as he lowered his head at Cleo.

"My apologies."

"Think nothing of it. You really love dragons, I see. But I do understand those feelings just a bit. To want to get on such a large back, and ride somewhere..."

Were those her true feelings? It didn't seem the one in question noticed it. Rudel would be able to let Cleo on her back. But as he thought over whose permission he'd have to get, a knight leading soldiers along made his appearance.

(Green hair?)

The knight stood out more than the others. No, from Rudel's point of view, he felt his skill level was a cut above the rest. But he the soldiers behind him didn't quite look like elites. Even as they closed in, the three soldiers cowered at Sakuya.

"Princess, so this is where you were? I have a message from his majesty."

"... Yes. Ah, Rudel-dono, this is Emilio. He used to serve as my guard."

"And I am still serving as your guard, Princess."

"Is that so? I had yet to hear about that, but... very well. Emilio, I'll be counting on you again."

"Much obliged."

Cleo happily spoke with Emilio. In contrast, Emilio took on a businesslike correspondence. To Rudel, it somehow felt as if the knight was pushing himself. Hearing the message from Barqah, he instantly understood it was meant to pull the princess from her family.

Once Emilio related it, Cleo's expression clouded after all. And the royal children got together to say their goodbyes. They were firm-hearted, Rudel thought. It was at that moment the knight... Emilio looked at him and narrowed his eyes. He felt something close to rage.

"U-um..."

When Rudel turned, he found the three soldiers in light-weight armor lined up.

One's face was unshaven. One was slender and tall. And the last one was short and stout. At a glance, they didn't look much like soldiers at all.

"Is something the matter?"

"N-no. It's just a rare opportunity to speak with a knight of foreign lands, so. Um..."

"Boss, you can do it!"

"Boss, fight on!"

After looking at the two cheering on the bearded man, Rudel sent a glance to Izumi and Millia. The two of them shook their heads as if they didn't know what was going on either.

(It doesn't feel like they're picking a fight.)

"W-we were also chosen as guards, so we thought we ought to give our greetings. No, I don't know a thing about knights' etiquette, so I've no clue what to do."

A forced use of words. And attitude... thinking of Rudel's standing, it wasn't something to be permitted. Even to any dragoon of the major power of Courtois, that was a bit much. Or so was the general consensus.

But Rudel smiled and held out his right hand.

"I'm Rudel Arses. There's a lot I don't know in this mission as well. It would be a big help if you helped me out."

"Y-yeah! Leave it to me."

"He shook hands with a dragoon! Boss is amazing!"

"S-shake my hand too!"

As Rudel shook hands with the three, Izumi, who had wandered to his side, called out.

“Is this alright?”

What, she wouldn't say. But he understood what she was worried about. Rudel was a dragoon in foreign lands... what's more, the representative of Courtois. Answering to such a light treatment might not be taken too well.

“It's fine. The feelings got across. Rather, I'm sorry for pushing guard duty onto you two as well.”

“That's not a problem. It's my field of expertise.”

While at this very moment, Izumi was stationed to keep an eye on Rudel as a special investigator, she was originally a high knight. As a bodyguard, she was even more knowledgeable than Rudel.

“I'm sorry to you too, Millia.”

“I-it's fine, doesn't matter.”

As Millia turned her face away, Rudel mulled over what he had said wrong. Unlike with Izumi, he didn't understand how Millia felt in the slightest.

“Boss, you think that dragoon doesn't understand a woman's heart?”

“Quit it, Passan. See, get in the way of someone's love and... huh? What was supposed to kick you again?”

(TL: The saying he's referring to is, Get in the way of someone's love, and you'll get kicked by a horse and die. Meaning, if you stand in the path, the horse is going to run you over.)

When Ben looked at Pono, Pono also thought a while. But unable to hit on anything, he looked up at the dragon.

“A dragon's kick looks painful.”

“That's right! Passan, you'll get kicked by a dragon.”

“I-in that case, to hell with that!”

As the party of three cowered from Sakuya, Rudel spoke.

“Sakuya's fists hurt more than her kicks...”

“Rudel, I don't think that's the point.”

“... Why is everyone so stupid.”

Izumi pointed out Rudel's err, while Millia breathed out a sigh.



Meanwhile...

“Hey, why are we wearing these robes?”

“Ah, these are really convenient, you know. There's a special fiber weaved in, making them top-grade products that can slip through magical detection!”

“Why did you have something like that on you!? That's what I want to know!”

Aleist and Nate wore black robes as they walked down the alley. There were arrows drawn on the walls, and simply by following them, they arrived at their destination. As he walked down the maze-like back alleys different from those in the kingdom of Courtois, Aleist was holding his nose and mouth.

“Even so, this place is too confusing, the smell is harsh and... what business do you have here anyway?”

Nate silently climbed the bridge, sitting on the spot and touching her palm to the wood flooring. Looking right around, she scratched her face.

“No combat took place, so there aren't any traces. The main road has too many people so the traces have all disappeared... so I guess we're just wasting our time.”

“Come so far and we're wasting time?”

While Aleist looked surprised, Nate deeply pulled down her hood. She ran off from the spot. Startled by her swift movements, Aleist chased her a little behind. There, at the end of the bridge, they ran into a man wearing a similar robe.

But Nate thrust a dagger at his throat. Pinning him up against the wall, a knife fell at the hooded man's feet. Nate kicked it away and slid it towards Aleist.

Quickly retrieving it, Aleist felt a dull glow from the knife's edge. A sticky liquid had been plastered over it.

“Senpai, you'd better not touch that.”

“This couldn't be...”

“Poison. A powerful one at that. It’s the sort that induces numbness, but get it in the wrong places and it’ll leave permanent effects.”

(Yeeaaaah, the knife I can deal with, but what exactly is Nate supposed to be?)

While she had always been a member of his harem, with the sword master Seli and the tiger tribe chieftain’s daughter Juju, in an assortment of all sorts of quirky ones, he thought she was a relatively docile girl. But Aleist felt he would have to reevaluate his recognition of her.

When Nate muttered something, the power left the robed man’s body as he collapsed to his knees. He wouldn’t meet eyes with her.

“Where did you come from?”

“... G-Gaia.”

“Eh? The empire? Is he a tourist?”

While Aleist desperately thought, Nate dispatched one question after the next. But after a certain extent of time, an arrow was fired. The sound of an arrow released from the depths of the passage, the one to react quickest was Aleist.

Pulling the two swords at his waist, he leapt out to protect Nate from the arrow. He brushed the projectile aside, slamming it at the wall. There, a man in a robe jumped out from the alley.

At the same time, came an assault from atop the building.

“Senpai, we should probably run.”

“Way ahead of you!”

Rather than aiming for them, the group seemed to be focused on rescuing their supposed ally, so Aleist and Nate ran. But Aleist...

“You know... aren’t we in a really bad situation here?”

Racing down the maze-like alleys, he said to Nate. There with her hood still on, Nate stuck out her tongue and hit a fist against her head.

“Yep, real bad. Tehe.”

“That wasn’t cute at all! What do you think you’re doing!? Rather, what are we even trying to do here!?”

Aleist's pained cry echoed through the alley.
Perhaps from a stroke of good luck, or because they were let off, the robed men showed no signs of chasing the two.

Extra: Songstress 4

Having accepted a mission to be Cleo's guard, Rudel stood before Emilio's unit in thought.

(Even if they're official knights and soldiers, how truly unreliable for a princess' guards.)

While that wasn't the best way to put it, it was one knight and three soldiers. ... From Rudel's point of view, it wasn't an assortment that made him feel much motivation.

In the room he had been permitted use, the princess Cleo, and those assigned to be her guards had to think about their roles henceforth. A lady servant prepared tea for everyone. Within all that, Rudel called over to Emilio who was looking at him.

"Emilio-dono, in regards to the guard detail, I'd like to decide on the division of labor."

"... That should do just fine. But even if I say that, the departure is in two days, so our mission only covers today, tomorrow, and the next morning. You don't mean to tell me Courtois' elite Dragoon requires sleep to exhibit his strength?"

It was a provocative phrasing, but Rudel understood his sentiment. The king of his country didn't trust the knights of his own country. In a situation where he had to follow the orders of a foreign knight, there was no helping his irritation. What's more, he was trying to do his job.

For now, that was enough... no, thinking of the mission period, it was plenty.

In that meeting-room like space, the nine of Courtois and Celestia sipped their tea in an inexpressible atmosphere. Cleo sat in a chair conversing with Izumi and Millia.

In front of the entranceway, the nervous soldier party of three stood to the side of the door.

(They're too tense. They're not going to hold out to nightfall...)

From the way they stood, Rudel perceived they hadn't received a great degree of training. He looked at Emilio. Emilio was reputed to be proficient, and on the way here, he had spoken of how he saved Cleo in the incident.

Perhaps he was a trustworthy knight.

"We will be fine. Your worry is uncalled for. But if it's possible to increase the number of knights and soldiers, then I must make the plea."

Without an incentive to oppose, Rudel thought of nothing more than increasing the guard success rate. He simply tried to handle it with numbers.

But Emilio shook his head.

"That will be impossible. With last time's attack, the knights have been spread out to the limit to provide security for the fortress city. The soldiers as well."

As Emilio said that, Rudel thought.

(This is your country's princess we're talking about. But still...)

Rudel looked at Cleo. While she did seem cultured, it was honestly hard to imagine she had received education as a member of the royal family. She was kind at heart, but he heard much too many words from her mouth that would show weakness in foreign diplomacy. As seen as a princess, she was a failure, as a person, a kind and beautiful woman.

(A life lived just for death, eh.)

Rudel recalled Sakuya.

He recalled the goddess who cast away what little remained of her life to grant him a dragon. While the reborn Sakuya carried on her name, her memories didn't remain.

He suddenly ended up seeing Cleo overlap with the goddess. Rudel closed his eyes and suppressed his emotions.

(That is this country's problem. The mission I've been given is to guard her until the day comes. Don't waver, Rudel.)

Reminding himself of it, he returned to his discussion with Emilio.

"It would probably be best for a woman to enter the princess' private

quarters. I shall station Izumi and Millia at her side. The rest of us should guard her when on the move, and defend the perimeter while she is asleep. Of course, the soldier at the door will be deployed on rotation.”

Emilio grit his teeth at Rudel’s words. He was also aware the party of three didn’t have the stamina to keep up guard duty for two days.

Listening in, the three raised their voices.

At their cry, Cleo was surprised as well.

“We’re not chopped liver!”

“T-that’s right! An all-nighter is nothing.”

“With an afternoon nap, I think it’ll work out?”

Following on from stubble Ben’s loud voice, Pono weakly voiced the same opinion. Passan gave a reply that was quite clearly right out.

Emilio grit his teeth at that reply. Perhaps he wanted to tell them to shut it, but before Rudel and the others, he held it in.

“You lot, we don’t need your input for now. Once matters are decided, I’ll relay the orders.”

“I-I mean, captain...”

While Ben hesitated, Emilio silenced him with just a glare. Rudel evaluated him as a knight with some experience under his belt.

(He’s skilled. And unlike me, he has experience.)

Rudel himself could easily tally up his own real combat experience. Even so, as he looked at Emilio, he felt something close to home.

From Rudel’s point of view, this mission was a mission given to him because he had contracted with a splendid dragon... with Sakuya. Perhaps it was precisely because he knew that, that he could act so calmly.

But Emilio didn’t take kindly to his composure.

“Then how about it? Why not use this opportunity to discern one another’s level of ability?”

“... I have no problem with that.”

He brought the match to Rudel.



Cleo brought her feet to the training grounds used by the knights.

It was her first visit, and she did feel a something more suffocating than she had imagined. The training ground build indoors was lined with wooden swords, spears, and logs to use as targets.

When Rudel’s and co. were the only ones who were supposed to be there, the place reeked of men. Perhaps the way the room was constructed to hold in heat was to blame.

“I-it feels a little peculiar here. Are the knights always training in a place like this?”

Cleo struck up conversation with Izumi to her side. Black hair was a rare sight to her. And the dignified Izumi was older than her, giving off a reliable impression. If her own country had female knights, she imagined they would surely give off such a feeling.

“It varies by country and knight brigade, but when it’s built indoors, it can’t really be helped.”

Izumi understood what she wanted to say, not saying anymore. From how muddled her words were, Cleo understood it was pretty much the same wherever you went.

It was true that she was a little excited, coming to such a place for the first time.

But...

“Unacceptable! You’re nowhere near up to par!”

“Ow!”

“Not enough training!”

“Geh!”

“No technique to speak of!”

“Bubrah!”

As she saw Rudel take down the three coming at him bare-handed, her face

turned pale. Looking at Izumi and Millia to her side, they were making unconcerned faces.

Defeating the three challengers in an instant, Rudel brushed off his hands as he spoke. At his feet were the forms of three trying to stand. Pono and Passan still struggling to their feet. And Ben had clutched onto Rudel's ankle.

"But your resolve alone gets a passing grade."

Hearing of their success, the three of them passed right out.

"I-is that a dragoon? That all happened too fast for my eyes to follow."

While Cleo was troubled, Millia explained.

"It's fine. Rudel is outside of the norm, so you don't have to compare him to a standard knight. As long as you remember he's the strange one, you won't have any problems."

"I-is that so. He's strange? I don't know anything when it comes to knights."

The troubled Cleo looked at Rudel. He was hoisting up the three, and putting them to sleep on the benches. Emilio took off his overcoat and tossed a wooden sword at Rudel.

Catching it, Rudel took a stance with the left side of his body protruding forward.

"I don't see a shield."

Emilio also got in stance as he said. Rudel laughed.

"I just don't want to change my stance. And I've no intentions of getting hit."

On Rudel's provocation, the two of them stepped in for an intense clash of wood. Looking at Emilio on the moment of impact, Cleo was surprised to find there was a knight who could keep up with Emilio. Fighting on even terms with the knight heralded as a genius was surely a marvel.

Seeing her expression, Izumi spoke up.

"Neither side is particularly serious, so there won't be any injuries."

"I-is that so?"

As Cleo looked at two knights violently swinging their wooden swords, it

seems she thought they were going full force. There, Emilio increased the arc of his sword. With that opening, Rudel tried to leap in, only to instantly jump back.

Giving pursuit, Emilio gradually strengthened his offensive.

Seeing the superiority of a knight of her country, no matter how much she detested violence, Cleo was relieved. The fact that her country's knight could stand his ground against a knight of Courtois was an important fact.

But Izumi made a bit of a conflicted face.

"The world sure is vast. To think he would have a move like that."

Cleo couldn't understand what she was saying.



In his match with Emilio, Rudel saw an opening and tried to dive in. But he found himself on the receiving end of an attack.

The wooden swords came at him left and right, but there were a number of slashes that faded away as if they had only been afterimages. And some attacks where he couldn't even see the swing.

"You use some interesting moves."

He found his mouth curving into a smile, so Rudel took a big step back and used his left hand to cover his face. Through the gaps in his fingers, he could see Emilio's haste. Even if neither side had been serious, that was more than enough to measure the other's competence.

(This is bad. I want to fight more.)

His emotions surging, Rudel renewed his grip on the wooden sword in his right hand. This time, he would go on the offense to probe out the identity of his enemy's move.

But there, Izumi raised her voice.

"That's enough, both of you."

Rudel looked at Izumi, and saw Cleo who'd been looking over the match was teetering. Perhaps her eyes had spun too much to follow the two moving around.

Taking a deep breath, Rudel parted his left hand from his face. There, Emilio gave a slight smile.

“Dragoon.”

He gestured towards the sleeve of his left hand. While he had removed his coat, looking closely, there was a slight tear on his shirt’s sleeve.

Knowing that had been inflicted by the enemy’s sword, Rudel laughed just a bit.

“It does seem this match is my loss.”

It wasn’t the sort of wound that would decide victory or defeat, but at the very start, Rudel had declared he wouldn’t be hit. In that case, even if it was a graze, he decided to admit his loss. Perhaps Emilio hadn’t anticipated that attitude, as he was a little taken aback.

But retrieving up his own overcoat, he headed for Cleo.

“Princess, you should return to your room.”

“I-I’m sorry, Emilio.”

Millia approached the two of them, while Izumi picked up Rudel’s coat and walked over. Before presenting the coat to Rudel, she handed over something to wipe his sweat.

“How was it?”

Rather than Emilio’s capabilities, she was more curious about the technique he had displayed.

“I thought it was a large swing, but that was just to draw my attention. His real aim was a sharper swipe I couldn’t see... I thought, but that’s wrong too. There’s definitely some trick or device to it.”

“You look happy. You’d better not show that face before the princess.”

Rudel was a battle enthusiast. As long as he had a strong foe, he was the sort of man who would want to fight to climb to greater heights. He repented at Izumi’s words, but at the same time, he thought.

(I want to fight him seriously for once, but that doesn’t look plausible.)

“... Rudel, I’ll just throw this out there, but...”

Izumi understood what was going through his mind. A little panicked, Rudel took the coat off her hands.

“I know. The mission takes priority.”

“As long as you get it. For now, let’s go to the princess’ room.”

The two walked off, leaving the party of three behind.



Having removed their robes, Aleist and Nate walked down the main road.

The two of them linked arms, walking the street like lovers. But as the color of Nate’s hair stood out, there were many heads that turned to take a second look at her.

Giving a bitter smile, Aleist pretended to have fun.

“Aha, ahahaha, how fun!”

“Oh darling, oh you!”

The one who suggested they put on a couple’s act was Nate. And Aleist was extremely against it. But she earnestly convinced him that the attackers of the Gaia Empire wouldn’t give chase if they stayed in character.

For that sake, Aleist and Nate paced the main road as if on a date.

(This is definitely unnecessary. How did she manage to convince me this was a good idea?)

Generally speaking, persuading Aleist was not a difficult task. The reason being, if you just kept pushing him, he would fold under pressure. If that wasn’t the case, then he would’ve been able to prevent the continued expansion of his harem. And it was precisely because he was unable, that Nate could push through.

(Am I too much of a pushover after all?)

He thought as the two dropped by a stall. The lad manning the stall called out to her in a lively voice.

“That’s some splendid blue hair you’ve got there, madam.”

“You think so? We just came to Celestia to see the sights. But for some reason, I feel like I’m really sticking out.”

Taking on a half-witted tone as she spoke with the shopkeeper, she moved the conversation towards gathering information. In order to stay out of the way, Aleist looked at the souvenirs lining the space.

“What’s this, it’s amazing! (Why am I praising such a peculiar piece, I wonder.)”

What he took in hand was an ornament made of a round torso, and four cylindrical legs. He thought it was a spider, but for that, the number of legs was too scarce. Where the round body leveled off, making one think a face might go there, a red paint had been slathered on.

It almost looked like a single eye.

As Aleist took the souvenir in hand, the shopkeeper closed in on him rather than Nate.

“That’s the guardian deity.”

“Eh? This thing is!?”

Surprised that something like this was a god, Aleist carefully inspected the article in his hands. No matter how he looked at it, he could only see a mud doll made by a child.

“To be more specific, it’s modeled after the god’s servants you can find on the mountain. Heard they look quite like the god. The real one’s enshrined where the ceremony takes place, but ordinary folk aren’t allowed in, see. So like this, we make souvenirs of the servants that are said to look like the god.”

“Hmm~.”

Aleist looked at the piece. But he wasn’t getting any image of a god. All he saw was a bug, or perhaps a robot drone that’s job it was to be done in.

“Hey! Shopkeep, we were in the middle of talking!”

“S-sorry for that. It can’t be helped if you stand out. Blue is the hair color of the royal family in these parts. What’s more, the shrine maidens who hold a special meaning. The area’s real tense right now, so the surrounding eyes are

going to be harsh. Don't let it get to you."

"What happened?"

"In the past, see? A little before the previous ritual. The royal princesses splendidly fulfill their roles, but even so, there was an unruly one in the royal family."

From the shopkeeper's tone, Aleist wondered what could have happened in the past. And as he put power into his hands, one of the ornament's legs snapped off.

"Aaaah!"

When the shopkeeper screamed out, Nate raised a laugh.

"You can't do that, darling!"

"Ah, no, wait!"

A panicked Aleist apologized to the shopkeeper, saying he would buy it, and producing money from his wallet. Having bought that dubiously high-priced artifact, Aleist spilled complaint after complaint within.

(If it was fragile, he could've just said it.)

Now with the deadweight ornament to occupy him, Aleist didn't have to hold Nate's hand as they made a round around the other shops lining the main road.



There was no light in that palace room.

Paying mind to his surroundings, the one who entered was Emilio. He called out to the individual within. But he couldn't see their face.

"Oh, what seems to be the matter?"

"This room is too bright."

"... You sound like you're in a hurry. What happened?"

In that room purposed to give reports to his contact, Emilio gave the right watchword in response. The normal lost servant would just be turned away, but if the password was correct, the contact would fulfill their original job.

"Soldiers who don't know anything have been made my subordinates. Can

they be taken off”

“They cannot. They have been selected as those for whom it matters not if they disappear.”

Hearing that, Emilio muttered an, I see. His face was a little concerned.

(I’d like to do something for them, but...)

After learning that he couldn’t take the three off for the sake of his goal, Emilio immediately gave his report.

“That dragoon’s skills are greater than expected. I have begun to doubt whether I can win or not.”

“I’m aware. But I heard you injured him... as expected of a knight of Celestia.”

“I could do without the flattery.”

As Emilio said that, the contact relayed the orders.

“... Depart from the palace tomorrow. The preparations are ready for that.”

“Won’t they think it too unnatural?”

“Just have it come from the princess’ mouth. Then the higherups should accept it without complaint.”

Emilio listened to the plan and hammered the contents into his head. Any memos he took would leave evidence. That’s why they met in a dark room. Emilio didn’t know the other party’s face. But they knew Emilio.

(This is getting troublesome.)

“... And that is all. The princess is necessary for the plan. The ceremonial tools are all together, so all that’s left is,”

“I know. I just have to present the princess to your group, right? What happened before shall not happen again.”

“... Are you sure about that? After looking into it, it seems they came from the Gaia Empire. Though we haven’t gone as far as to look into why they came.”

“That’s your job. I’d appreciate if you did it properly.”

Emilio recalled when he was surrounded. He remembered the group in the black robes.

“I must apologize for that. Then make sure tomorrow goes according to plan.”

“Leave it to me.”

Emilio left and looked around. From the start, it was a corridor that experienced little passage. And as he walked off, he muttered.

“Tomorrow, huh. I’ll have to do something about the Dragoon and his comrades, but how should I go about this.”

Unbeknownst to himself, Emilio’s hand had reached to touch the egg-shaped pendant in his breast pocket from over his clothes.

The dragoon was taking part, and he had even been stuck with subordinates who would drag him down. Just how would he struggle through the next day? Emilio thought.

Extra: Songstress 5

The first night on guard duty.

Izumi and Millia stayed alert in the princess' private room on rotation.

There was little to be found in that frugal room one wouldn't imagine belonging to a princess. Her garments were always prepared by the maidservants, so there very many pieces in the closet.

Izumi investigated the room for what it was worth, but Cleo, who should've hated it, seemed to slightly enjoy the notion.

Sitting on her bed, Cleo grinned as she looked at Izumi keeping guard at the side of the room.

"S-something the matter?"

The place was different to Courtois, and Izumi thought perhaps she had committed a discourtesy as she called over to Cleo. But Cleo's response was different.

"No. It is simply the first time I've invited a foreigner into my room... I found it a tad joyous."

Izumi didn't feel too bad, hearing that from her. This was also part of the mission, and she would keep up the conversation.

"Is that so? I'm something of a refugee. I'm sure the color of my hair is rare around these parts."

"Really? Would it be alright if I heard the story?"

Cleo's eyes glistened as they looked at Izumi.

(It's not a bad feeling for her to be interested in me, but in the middle of a mission, it's a bit...)

Troubled, Izumi apologized that she would have to stay standing.

"My house was originally from an island nation in the far east. Let's see, the knights there use swords like this one, similar to sabers. They're called bushi

and samurai over there, but their role is similar to the knights of this country.”

As Izumi gave a simple explanation of her homeland, Cleo happily listened in. While she got the feeling she was acting a bit too young for her age, Izumi couldn’t bring herself to hate her.

“And the fact you’re seeking refuge means, umm...”

“Yes, my house was caught up in a war, and left the country. If they didn’t do so, I’m not sure I’d be living in this world.”

Seeing Cleo’s saddened face, Izumi regret her words. She should’ve talked about something more interesting, she thought, as she gave a meaningful clearing of her throat to change the topic.

“But now that I think back, I don’t see it as a bad thing. I attended the academy in Courtois, and I’m here as an honorable high knight.”

When Izumi smiled, Cleo did too. And she looked out the window.

“I don’t know anything... unlike my younger brothers and sisters, I was fated to be offered as the maiden from the start. So my education was kept to a minimum. I rarely had any opportunities to speak to a foreigner, so today was fun.”

To be offered. It meant her life would be forfeit. Izumi and Rudel had investigated the internal affairs of Celestia beforehand, and it was the most famous story about the country, so she knew about it.

About the blue-haired tribe that offers life to the god who made even Courtois stand down.

“I know I’m really not supposed to say this, but I’m happy that my attack let me meet everyone. I was even able to see a dragon.”

To change the topic, Izumi picked up the thread on Sakuya.

“You should mention that to Rudel tomorrow. If you tell him you want to see a dragon up-close, Rudel will be delighted.”

“Rudel-dono will? I don’t mean ill, but he’s a peculiar one, isn’t he? Millia-san did say, ‘he’s the strange one, you’re not crazy’.”

Cleo's impression towards Rudel seemed to be fixed on him being a strange one. Labelling that a misunderstanding or mistake was something Izumi found exceedingly hard to do. Thinking about Rudel using Courtois' knights as a frame of reference brought about numerous problems.

"H-he is strange, but he's a good guy. A really good guy!"

It was the greatest defense she could muster.

"Fufufu, you get along, I see."

"Yes, he's a precious friend."

Seeing Izumi's expression as she said that, Cleo tilted her head. Something wasn't sitting right in her stomach; she tried asking Izumi.

"You're not lovers? Um, you make a wonderful face whenever you talk about Rudel-dono, you know."

"That's wrong. He's a dear friend from the academy. A little circumstance has led me to stay by his side as a colleague, nothing more and nothing less."

If she called it a little circumstance in Courtois, the royal palace would be abuzz with cries of, 'are you sure you're taking this seriously with an attitude like that?'. For the sake of the country, Izumi was appointed as Rudel's special inspector. It wasn't an exaggeration to say it was a mission of the utmost importance.

Rudel was generally classified as a first-rate knight. Strong, proud, and even loyal. But the most important thing was... he was an idiot.

Not the sort that couldn't study, the type that burst into erratic conduct the very moment the idea struck his head. Even after he was instated in the dragoon brigade, he had repeated numerous bouts of problematic behavior that dragged all his surroundings in. What's more, the biggest problem to Courtois was the fact Rudel had obtained an outrageous dragon like Sakuya.

'If that thing gets serious, this country is seriously done for.'

The reason the upper brass seriously thought so was largely due to a single knight, feared by Courtois and all the countries that bordered it.

Rudel idolized that knight... Marty Wolfgang.

It's been said the King of Courtois once cried out, 'Why did it have to be him of all people!' or something along those lines...

Putting all jokes aside, there was no doubt keeping Izumi with Rudel was an important measure.

"Are you sure?"

Said Cleo with a slight laugh.

As Izumi found it strange, Cleo spoke.

"I'm sorry. Love gossip, was it? I wanted to try doing something like that."

Cleo was raised in the castle. She was raised as if the only important thing was that she was alive until the time came... or so was the feeling Izumi got.

The room's interior was modest, and she could think it belonged to a princess who held an important role.

"At the end, my dreams keep getting granted one after the next, I'm overjoyed."

"... Is that... so."

Izumi didn't know what words to send her anymore.



Once the night had advanced, two faces peeped out of an inn window with a view of the palace.

It was Aleist and Nate.

Nate peered into her telescope, changing the magnification with the regulator stuck to the side as she inspected every last detail. Aleist wasn't very knowledgeable on the matter, but as it was constructed as a magic item, it was most certainly an expensive piece. Not something Nate would be able to purchase.

There was one at Aleist's house as well, but he had only ever seen his father carefully stow it away a few times.

"I was also thinking it around noon, but who really are you, Nate?"

When Aleist asked, Nate continued peering into the telescope as she conversed.

“You want to know? Once you know, there’s no going back? Senpai, you might just get swallowed up in the mysteries of an enigmatic woman like me.”

“Yeah, not happening. I just wanted to ask what sort of secret you have.”

Aleist waved his hand, laughing Nate’s words away. And he decided to change the topic.

“So what are you doing?”

“I’m confirming the state of the castle. The departure’s the day after tomorrow, but there’s no telling what’ll happen until then.”

“The day after tomorrow?”

Aleist tried to recall what would happen in two days.

He remembered Rudel’s main mission would take place at that time.

“Come to think of it, is Rudel alright?”

“Sakuya-chan’s nice and quiet, so I think he’s just fine. Rather, she’s fidgeting restlessly, and it doesn’t seem she can settle down.”

“Eh? You can see her with that? Let me have a go.”

“Go ahead. If you adjust it here, you can change the scaling.”

Accepting the telescope, Aleist zoomed out to search for Sakuya. He spotted her popping her head over the castle wall from time to time.

She seemed restless and unsettled.

“What is that girl doing?”

As Aleist said that, Sakuya’s eyes met with Aleist’s across the telescope. That was scary, he thought, putting the telescope down, and looking at the castle in the distance. From here, he couldn’t see Sakuya’s form. Somewhat relieved, he tried peering in again, only to find her staring straight at him this time.

“... Nate, thank you.”

He didn’t want to think Sakuya had noticed them, but Aleist was hated by

Sakuya. In the case that he really was sighted, the very fact Sakuya moved would become a huge problem.

“You’re already done with it?”

He returned the telescope to Nate. There, as if suddenly hitting on something, she began to speak.

“Come to think of it, senpai, you have any interest in peeping? In that case, you want me to lend you my telescope?”

Nate gave a sly laugh as she held out the device, but Aleist was getting tired, so he wanted to return to the bed. What’s more he had no interest in peeping.

“What’s that? Ah, no, I’m fine.”

Having lost interest in such talks as of late, it was on a level where he wanted a magic device to prevent being peeped on. Within Aleist’s harem, there were a few who specialized in magic. Those girls would identify Aleist’s bathing time to launch their attacks.

“Rather, you know, give me something so I don’t get peeped on myself.”

While Aleist made a relatively sincere plea, Nate’s face twitched.

“... I know I’m not one to speak, but you really are an off one, senpai.”

“You think? I don’t notice it myself anymore. I’ve just kinda been real tired these days, see... ah, you’d better honor your promise and not assault me.”

Nate looked at him with a dubious face.

“Isn’t it supposed to be the other way around? I’m the one who should be worried about getting assaulted.”

Nate spread out her arms to show off her own lightly dressed fresh-out-of-the bath form. Short, white pants, a simple shirt above... what’s more, the slight see-through nature of her clothing allowed a faint glance at her undergarments. Though it just looked to Aleist that she had purposely chosen undergarments with striking colors for the contrast.

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t even assault you if you asked me to.”

Giving an immediate reply, he took his eyes off of Nate and looked at the

room. Two single beds...

(Well, even if she tried, I'll be able to run away. My intuition's been particularly sharp in those things as of late, I'll be able to notice before she makes her move.)

Flopping down on the bed, Aleist was delighted he'd be able to get his first restful sleep in a long time. While Nate was there, he didn't seem to pay her the slightest mind.

"Early to bed, early to rise, what a wonderful phrase! Goodnight."

"Uwah..."

Nate's face was filled with conflicted sentiment.



Once morning came, Rudel went out to the plaza to see Sakuya.

Perhaps because of her presence, the plaza looked a little narrow. And around, the soldiers seemed to be surrounding her on lookout.

'Ah, Rudel.'

When Sakuya moved, the surrounding soldiers cowered. There were some whose hips gave out, and others that readied their spears.

"What's wrong? You don't look too peppy."

Seeing Sakuya not in the best health, he worried a bit, when Sakuya took a look around.

'Um, well, you see... someone was looking. And Sakuya can't calm down when she's not in the ground.'

Sakuya was a subspecies of the gaia dragon that made their homes in the soil. As expected, they were most calm in the ground, and when sleeping outside... what's more, an unfamiliar place, it was too unsettling.

(But even if she says looking, with so many soldiers around, isn't that natural?)

Rudel looked around and saw the cowering soldiers looking at him with eyes demanding he did something about this. While Rudel could hear Sakuya's voice,

only Rudel could hear Sakuya's voice. To the others, it just sounded as if she was raising a growl.

"Don't worry. Right... I'll ask if there's anywhere nearby you can dig a hole. Your special mission is tomorrow after all. It should be fine if you stay on standby until then."

A dragoon and dragon could communicate with their hearts. Rudel thought he could just call her if it came down to it. Though he didn't think he would actually get permission for her to dig a hole.

'Really!? The earth around here feels really warm, so it was on my mind the whole time! I want to build a house soon.'

"... No, making something so full-blown is a bit..."

Rudel felt somewhat apologetic. When it came to digging holes... no, to making dens, Sakuya had her hangups. She would make a number of chambers, designating the room furthest in as her private room. It wasn't just a bit of a cave... it was a full-blown cave system.

Perhaps she had a good feel for the ground, or it was just intuitive, but amazingly, even if she arbitrarily dug with her power, it never crumbled. But even if he explained that, he doubted the people of Celestia would understand.

"Can you make due with a simple one? We'll be returning tomorrow."

'... Fine.'

Sakuya's sulking hurt Rudel's heart.

(Sakuya... how cute can you be.)\But as a dragon idiot, even if his heart hurt as he looked at her, he still found her cute.



"It passed."

"What did?"

Rudel sat at the same table as Cleo and Millia for breakfast. Izumi was still asleep, so it was a meal for just the three of them.

Near the door, Ben and Passan stood at attention. The party of three

consisted of soldiers, and they were unable to eat breakfast with the princess.

For Rudel and Millia, it was treated as special.

“No, I went and asked Emilio-dono if there was anywhere Sakuya could dig a hole, early in the morning. When I did, he got permission.”

“... Is that really alright?”

As Millia sent him a doubtful glance, Rudel thought over it as well.

(This does feel a little off. Normally, he'd want to keep Sakuya as close as possible, but... could it be the soldiers just complained that much.)

He thought over various things, but he had received permission, he started devising a plan to lead Sakuya to the location. It was already arranged that Rudel would be told the location after breakfast, sending Sakuya in the right direction once he returned to the castle.

Once the maidservant finished the preparations for breakfast, the three gave a Celestia-styled prayer and began to eat.

The scent of bread and bacon wafted through the room.

Rudel looked at the princess, thinking of her almost as a small animal as he watched. The way she ate wasn't unruly. More so, she was firmly following proper manners.

But the air around her was restless.

(Perhaps she's mindful of me and Millia.)

He thought, and after he had eaten his meal and sipped his tea, Cleo came out with a request.

“U-um... if it's possible, I'd like to see your dragon up close, would that be alright? Erm, Izumi-san said you would show me if I asked...”

After Cleo had shyly asked, Rudel quietly set down his cup. He looked at Cleo with a serious face.

Perhaps she was nervous, her body stiffened.

“Rudel?”

Millia sent over a worried voice. But Rudel...

“No problem at all. While we’re at it, would you care for a journey through the sky as I tell you the wonders of a dragon—! Millia, that hurts, you know.”

“Don’t hit on the princess! And there’s no way that would be allowed!”

As Millia talked on and on with a rough way of breath, she has a point, Rudel ended up agreeing. He had been delighted to hear of her interest in dragons.

But his aid came from an unexpected place.

“Um...”

“Something the matter.”

After the maidservant let out a voice, she lowered her head towards Rudel. And she made a desperate plea.

“I am aware of how discourteous this may be, but please take the princess into the sky!”

When he wondered what was up, the maidservant said something like that. He did think it wrong, but there Emilio made his appearance.

“A dragon, is it... I don’t see why not.”

“Emilio-dono?”

Unlike the day before, Emilio was taking on an attitude much too lenient. And he made a proposal to Cleo.

“Whatever the case, today is the only day the princess may have her freedom. Let’s see... all the more, why don’t you let her see the lands around the castle?”

“Don’t you think that’s going too far?”

Millia sighed, but Emilio let a slight laugh.

“No, I’ve actually been thinking it a while now. At least at the very end, the princess should be given some time to have fun... I’ve already received permission, everyone, please just unwind.”

As he said that and left, Rudel and Millia gazed at Emilio’s back. The difference between yesterday was one thing, but the problem lay elsewhere.

“I kinda feel something really off about this.”

The maidservant answered Millia’s words.

“That’s not true! Emilio-sama is Celestia’s finest knight. He is thinking about the princess. I was also desperately searching for something I could do for her and...”

The maid lowered her head and apologized for her rudeness. Next, it was Ben and Passan’s turns to lower their heads to Rudel.

“Boss Rudel, I’d like to make the plea too! Show the princess what it’s like outside the castle!”

“I’m beggin’ you here, boss Rudel!”

Millia endured a laugh as the two of them called him boss. Rudel looked over at Cleo.

(Well, I guess that depends on how Cleo-sama feels.)

He called over. But Cleo’s face was turned down.

“Cleo-sama, do you have any obj... Cleo-sama?”

A red face, shaking a little, when Cleo looked up into Rudel’s face, she started to panic.

“I-I! Um, uh... it’s the firth time anyone’s tried to hit on me!”

(Ah, she bit her tongue.)

Rudel was casually mindful of how she bit her tongue around the word first. Millia beside him held her head.

Extra: Songstress 6

Successfully driving everyone out, Emilio passed by the maid in service to Cleo as he walked down the hall.

Walking by her in that empty corridor, neither side took a glance at the other. When her back faced his, he quietly called over.

“You play well.”

“Oh my, and I’m sure I was changing my voice.”

As the maidservant giggled, Emilio’s mood took an unpleasant turn. The voice she replied in was the female voice that relayed information in the dark room.

“Right around now, all the hindrances are in the sky... the dragoon’s powerful partner is leaving the castle. The higherups will rejoice.”

Emilio didn’t know whose orders the contact was moving under. But he also knew the maid hadn’t the slightest intention of telling him.

“I wonder about that. You’ve already failed once before.”

“Those words had some thorns. Once noon has gone by, I’ll have them move according to plan.”

“I suppose I should tell you to do your best. It does seem those of the Gaia Empire obstructed you last time... and there were some skillful ones among them.”

Hearing that, Emilio narrowed his eyes. He warned himself not to let any emotion leak into his voice. Over his clothes, he touched the egg-shaped pendant in his breast pocket. It was a precious memento of his mother.

“Even so, it seems the princess has quite a longing for the lifestyle of the common folk. Is that your doing?”

“Yes. Ever since I began serving her, I spoke of things that would make her yearn for a common life. What she couldn’t experience in her limited life... I was told to give the princess a dream she would never reach no matter her yearnings. But I never thought that would prove useful here of all places. A

princess whose face goes red from being hit on is...”

Emilio grasped the gist of what the maid was trying to say. Cleo was much too dense to the malice around her. In her eyes, there were places where the ill-natured surroundings were only natural.

(I doubt she will find anything off. How truly pitiful...)

The maid continued on, as if to take over from his thoughts.

“... She truly is a pitiful girl. Her life taken without being of the slightest use, her days ending with her unable to accomplish anything.”

The maid’s voice was laughing. What’s more, it was the sort of laughter that made it seem she was enjoying herself so much she couldn’t help it.

“Sure enough. Once everyone has returned, I will go out to meet up with them. The location is...”

“If you’ll have them come to the central square, we will handle the rest.”

The maidservant walked off. From the depths of the corridor, another person came walking. Emilio started off as if nothing had happened at all.

(That’s right, this time, I’ll make it succeed.)

Taking his hand from his pendant, he strongly walked down the corridor. A resolve was beginning to seep into his expression.

(No matter what happens, Cleo will...)



Having taken off from the palace courtyard, Sakuya housed Rudel and Izumi, and Millia, Cleo and the party of three on her back.

“B-boss! The sky’s scary!”

“Let’s fly a little closer to the ground!”

“We’re really high up! If we fall, we’re gonna die!”

“If I fly lower, there will be collateral damage. You’ll have to put up with it.”

The three fell to all fours on Sakuya’s back, their faces pale, their bodies shaking as they tried their hardest not to look down. Rudel instantly vetoed their request.

In contrast, Cleo was...

“Amazing. So this is the sky! The sky only a dragoon can obtain!”

Delighted.

“That’s right! The sky only a dragoon can see! In order to get it in my hands, I worked hard from a young age!”

Every time Cleo rejoiced, Rudel was delighted as well. Almost as if he had gained someone who understood him, he frolicked along with the girl.

From the point of view of Izumi and Millia, whose hearts were dancing as they kept a close eye to make sure Cleo didn’t fall, it was a bit of a peculiar sight.

“Rudel, can’t you fly a little safer? And Cleo-sama, please take a seat and hold onto the handrail.”

Like a horse, Sakuya’s back was furnished with equipment for humans to ride her. A large bag was stuck on for luggage, and her equipment included things like handrails and cushions. Things that might prove necessary when escorting people.

Dragons of the gaia variant were slow when it came to transporting, but as they were able to move a large quantity of goods, they were a priceless addition to the dragoon brigade’s rear logistic support.

In battle, their slow speed and large bodies had them hated as easy targets, but even so, with their skin and scales that kept away normal attacks, they were the dragons that boasted the greatest destructive power. As a subspecies of such a race, it didn’t matter to Sakuya if there were seven people on her back.

“In the first place, why did they give permission? Letting the princess out like this shouldn’t be allowed... ah, come to think of it our second princess is casually attending the academy.”

When Millia spoke of the pink-haired expressionless princess, Cleo showed a degree of interest. But rather than the second princess Fina, she was interested in the academy.

“The academy, is it? A school that even royalty can attend sounds wonderful.”

“And wonderful it is! I especially enjoyed the fundamental curriculum’s

interclass tourney, and the upper classmen's' individuals' tournament."

At Rudel's statements that made it seem as if combat was the main activity, Izumi and Millia ended up sighing.

"No, you're just a special case."

Remembering the days of Rudel, Aleist, Eunius and Luecke fighting, Millia put a damper on his spirits.

"What makes you say that, Millia, you took part in a match in your fifth year as well! I think Aleist's confession prevented you from exhibiting your full strength, not that I think about it, that was a legitimate tactic and..."

Millia turned red to her ears as she cried out.

"Don't talk about that!!"

Not wanting to remember, she turned her face down.

But on the contrary, Cleo grew interested.

"It sounds amazing, Courtois' academy... my country does not have such an educational institution, so I find myself envious."

"I know, right!? When the tiger tribe men exchanged blows—"

"Rudel, don't you think we've had enough of that topic. You're giving the academy a strange image."

Izumi stopped him.

Atop Sakuya's back, they shared a laugh.

(I hope this takes her mind off it a bit.)

Rudel looked at the map he received from Emilio. And once Cleo and Izumi got into a girls' conversation, he stared hard at the map in thought.

(... It's a bit too far from the castle. If something happens and I have to call Sakuya, it will take too much time for her to return. This might have been a failure.)

Revoking it now would be a disservice to Emilio. But thinking of his duty to guard Cleo, Rudel knew that keeping Sakuya close would be the best deterrent.

Right, just a deterrent.

(No, did they fear Sakuya conducting combat near the palace? When we're doing the actual guard mission, we'll need Sakuya to serve as transport.)

If Sakuya was caught up in a battle near the palace or castle town, the surrounding area was instantly be turned to a mountain of rubble. As he still had his worries about holding back, Rudel was cautious in that field. In the case that an enemy attacked, he would have Cleo board Sakuya to evacuate her into the sky.

That alone would prevent enemy hands from reaching her. That was how he saw it, and he wasn't considering to have her take part in battle.

(It's a bit worrisome they don't seem to have any intent to protect her. Well, I'm the one who made the proposal, but... I should keep cautious.)

None too knowledgeable on the internal affairs of other countries, the fact his own country wasn't monolithic became a stroke of good luck. He was beginning to notice there might be a separate force moving within Celestia.

It was strange from the start.

By relying on a foreign nation for guards, they invited in the dissatisfaction of the knights, what's more, they didn't send enough manpower around.

Rudel looked at the party of three making pale faces.

(Their loyalty aside, if they're this unusable, I must presume they haven't received basic training.)

They were spies from the other force... he tried to consider, but they were too unreliable for that. He thought they might be concealing their real skill, but at least from what he could tell by fighting them, that didn't seem likely. And they had the mind to serve Cleo from the depths of their heart.

(They're a sort... I've never had around me.)

As far as Rudel knew, that type of retainer didn't exist on his home estate. He had seen enough of the opposite-those that mocked and tried to use him-to grow tired of them. Because of that, he found himself just a little envious of Cleo.

(But whatever the case, we should be nearing the limit. Thinking of the princess' stamina, we should descend and take a short break.)

It was nothing more than flying through the sky, but for those unaccustomed to it, the stamina expenditure was intense. Rudel decided to land and take some rest.

"Sakuya, it looks like the designated point is over there."
'Uwah, it's a warm-looking place.'

Rudel couldn't understand how the ground could look warm. But there was a mountain nearby with smoke rising from it.

"Is this area alright? It'll be hell if an eruption occurs."

The villages he spotted around made Rudel anxious. If the volcano erupted, the casualty figures would be severe. But near the volcano was a forest that had seen a good number of years.

"Ah, we're perfectly fine. The sort of eruptions I hear about from other lands never happen in Celestia."

Rudel inclined an ear to Cleo's explanation as he had Sakuya lower altitude.

"The guardian deity is in a different one... a shrine in the volcano you can see over there, but because of his protection, eruptions never occur. Not since the founding of Celestia... so at the very least, there hasn't been one in two hundred years."

On her words, Izumi was mildly surprised.

"Not a single major eruption in a few hundred years?"

Cleo shook her head.

"They can't happen. As I said it's because of the guardian deity."

Making a little... no, a sorrowful face, Cleo turned her head down. Unable to see her state given their position, the party of three regained their vigor as the ground approached, getting excited over the princess' explanation.

"Our god is amazing! The princess is amazing too!"
"He's a god after all! And as expected of the princess!"

“The god is amazing, but the princess is smart!”

On their three reactions, Cleo giggled a bit.

“That’s right. Even like this, I’ve studied, for what it’s worth. But it’s the first time anyone’s called me smart.”

Saying she was happy even if it was just flattery, Cleo smiled at the three. They seemed happy as well.

As Rudel looked at them, a scene of his own youth suddenly revived in his head.

(... That doesn’t matter right now.)

Issuing orders to Sakuya, he told everyone to prepare to land.

“Grab onto the handrails. We’re touching down.”



‘Building a house for Sakuya~.’

Sakuya sang a song as her large arms began digging a hole. Little ways away, Rudel watched as the mountain was shaved away.

Sakuya had her own criterion for which place was best, so she was apparently investigating. And with this serving as their break, Rudel and the others looked over the scene.

“... The rocks and dirt are flying through the sky.”

Ben looked at the parabola the soil drew in the air as he muttered.

“No matter how many times I see it, Sakuya’s digging is a magnificent sight.”

Rudel looked and nodded a few times.

“It’s amazing. If she has that much power, can the dragons do other jobs as well?”

Cleo’s question was answered by Izumi.

“They’re used for transport and land development. A skillful dragon can fulfill a number of roles.”

The princess took a keen interest to that response. Rudel recalled the port

town of Beretta where he was stationed. While it was built at a harbor, it wasn't as if there weren't any fields. Preparing those fields was left up to Keith... when the Lieutenant Keith didn't have any subordinates, his water dragon Spinnith could fulfill the role alone.

He didn't have the same level of power as Bennet's dragon, but if put to skilled labor, he could pull it off well. He made quite an undragon-like statement, saying he liked work that had to be built up one step at a time.

"Well, each dragon has its own quirks."

Don't just write off our problems as quirks, the upper echelons of Courtois would claw at Rudel if they heard the statement.

Sakuya was comfortably singing her song. There, going along with what should only sound like a dragon's growl to other humans, Cleo began to hum. She was gradually picking up the rhythm.

The party of three looked at Cleo with faces as if they were to be moved to tears.

"What's wrong?"

Ben explained to Rudel.

"What's wrong... ah, you didn't know? The princess is really good at singing. I don't know how long ago, but back when we was still jobless, unsteadily topplin' around, she was singing a song in the square. When we heard her singing, it moved us, got us inspired."

Ben began to shed tears.

When Rudel asked the reason, he found the three had left their village unable to find work, and once they came to the castle town of Celestia, they lived by rummaging through the trash. Troubled for food, they were honestly about to stick their hands into ill deeds.

But hearing the song in the square, they popped their heads out the alley, and saw it was Cleo who was singing.

That clear voice held a certain something that resounded in a person's heart. The fact these three hadn't turned to crime was thanks to Cleo, apparently.

The voice had caused them to reflect on themselves.

“It was a real pretty song, see. Ended up peppering us right up. What we was doing started to look stupid. We stopped caring how cheap the pay was, searched out a place to work, and ended up guarding a gate that no one ever used. People made fun of us, but we didn’t give a damn. Working earnest, earning money... she made us notice there was nothing more rewarding.”

Cen listened to Cleo sing as he told Rudel a tale. Pono continued on after him.

“When we begged and started out as trainees, it was nothin but cleaning and chores. But man, if we put the work in, even we could do it, boss.”

As Cleo’s mood gradually rose with her humming, she began lightly singing to herself. Passan closed his eyes to hear. Rudel also inclined his ear.

(I see, so these three feel indebted to the princess. But if a song’s all it took to get them back on their feet, perhaps they were good people to start with. Whatever the case...)

The three were troubled for food, fished through trash, and in the end, were about to commit crime. There were surely opportunities for ill deeds before it came to that, so Rudel concluded to himself they were good at heart. And that the song was only the trigger they needed.

But...

(Yep, it’s a nice voice. I’m no good with those things, but it feels pleasant on my ears. Perhaps this is talent.)

In Cleo’s singing voice, Rudel could also feel something echoing in his heart. As a noble, he had received a general education. Music was included. But when it came to fine arts, especially music, Rudel didn’t exhibit any particular knack or talent.

Rather, Eunius and Luecke achieved excellent grades in music and art.

... Aleist was out of the question.

But according to Luecke, perhaps he was just born in the wrong era. Apparently. In various ways, Aleist was too advanced.

As Rudel and the others lent an ear to Cleo’s song, Sakuya cried out.

‘Higyaaaaah!!’
“S-Sakuyaaa!!”

Responding to the scream, Rudel leapt out to find the hole Sakuya was haughtily excavating welling up with water and steam.

Rudel rushed over to Sakuya’s side, surprised by the heat rush of the vapor, and the temperature of the water.

“Is this a hot spring?”

As Sakuya finally managed to bob her head out of the water, Rudel jumped at it and latched on, calling out.

“Are you alright, Sakuya!? Any burns?”

While he was worried, there, Izumi called over.

“No, Rudel... Sakuya is a dragon, you know.”

Right. Sakuya was undoubtedly a dragon. And the dragon in question floated in the hot water as she remarked.

‘Haaah, it feels niicccee.’

She was quite satisfied by the hot spring she had dug up herself. Perhaps she had struck the source, as the water wasn’t at a temperature a human could enter. To a dragon, such matters were irrelevant.

(Kuh, Sakuya in a bath... she’s too cute.)

From atop Sakuya’s head, Rudel gazed at his own dragon with great satisfaction.



Returning to the castle, Rudel reported to Emilio.

Before a soaked Rudel who had removed his coat, Emilio spoke.

“... So you’re telling me you fell in when your dragon changed posture? You haven’t been burned, have you?”

“I am alright. My apologies.”

Rudel and the others had safely returned, but Rudel had fallen into the spring.

The reason was just as Emilio had detailed. Fed up, Emilio looked at Rudel as he ordered the servant in the room to bring him some clothes.

“Bring a change of clothing for Rudel-dono, if you please.”

Cleo’s maid nodded and left the room.

“Once Rudel-dono’s finished changing, we shall depart. Time is limited, after all.”

Feeling an urge to hold his head, Emilio looked at Rudel.

(Give me a break, Dragoon. I need you to do your job.)

It was a large strain on the plan.

But he continued thinking of how he would reconnect the ends of the deviating plan, and bring it towards a result he desired.

Cleo presented a towel to the soaked Rudel. The towel in Rudel’s hands was already sopping wet.

Rudel, Izumi, and everyone else felt ashamed.

(No, you’re not supposed to be doing that sort of thing.)

Emilio was troubled by Cleo’s correspondence.

“Princess, once the maid returns, leave Rudel-dono to her. Now let’s prepare to head o...”

After saying that much, Emilio noticed his own failure.

(Ah, wait a second. Cleo only has one maid. Then no one’s actually preparing for the plan?)

With everything in such a shapeless state, Rudel’s party were about to set out into the castle town.

Extra: Songstress 7

In the center of Celestia's busy center square, a statue of the country's founding queen was erected.

With the time being slightly past noon, the food stalls gave off a mouthwatering scent.

Steamed food seemed to be the norm as many people could be seen eating steamed vegetables topped with meats and sauces.

Other than that, the people who walked as they ate a food wrapped in white dough that let off meat juices stood out. Holding them in brown paper, their forms as their mouths let off steam as they ate left quite an impression.

The slight differences he could find from Courtois made it all the more interesting to Rudel.

Though that was also due to the fact Rudel's group had disguised themselves to play the part of tourists.

"Are they different from what you can find in Courtois? They're sweet pastries, aren't they?"

As Rudel put his impression to mouth, Cleo in the clothes of a village girl marveled alongside him. She didn't know what sort of food the townsfolk ate either.

"I can't think those are sweets..."

They let off steam, and the contents were filled with meat.

Once she voiced that, one of their guards, Passan explained.

"What Boss Rudel's talking about 's steamed buns. You wrap meat in a yeast dough 'n steam it, so it's a proper meal and not a sweet."

"Is that so? You're surprisingly knowledgeable."

As Rudel nodded in acceptance, a booth selling some sort of dolls caught Cleo's eyes.

There, Pono cautioned her.

“Prin... ah, no! Young lady, you shouldn’t touch those. They exceedingly easy to break, and the sort of souvenirs that force whatever tourists pick them up to buy them.”

Cleo swiftly drew back her hands

The old man manning the stall made a grim face as he saw that.

“It’s not like I’m tryin’ ta make them easy to break. It’s just, the manufacturing process, see. When you make them outa dirt, they’re gonna be fragile.”

Hearing the words from the shopkeeper, Rudel simply...

(Then do something about it.)

Thought from a customer’s viewpoint. In truth, if she picked one up and broke it, they would likely be forced to buy it. Millia, who had reached out in a similar fashion, now looked truly relieved.

“In the first place, that’s our guardian deity, who should be treated with care. It’s their fault for breaking them.”

On the old man’s opinion, Rudel looked at its form, but it was much too crude, and he could only barely make out its shape. An elliptical body with four thick legs stuck on; the only part of the doll colored in was an eye-like red point.

He could only see it as a rip-off.

(Was it made poorly, or does the original actually look like that... I get the feeling whoever makes them easy to break and puts them up for sale is also at fault.)

Rudel took a side-glance at Izumi.

She was keeping alert of their heavily crowded surroundings. And under the robe she wore as an escort, her hand was placed on her katana.

Rudel also directed his attention around.

There, Emilio took one of the clay dolls in hand and lifted it up.

His subordinate Ben warned him of the danger, but Emilio laughed and returned it to its original place.

His eyes were terribly cold.

“Now that we’ve seen the crude dolls that are this area’s specialty, let’s move on to the next area. Milady, it might be a little late, but how about lunch?”

Emilio suggested lunch to Cleo.

She curiously turned her eyes to the food stands. While there was something she wanted to eat, she couldn’t bring herself to say it.

Rudel called out to Passan. Producing his wallet from his inner breast pocket and handed over Celestian currency he had exchanged for.

“Passan, use this to buy something. It seems milady is interested in the food stalls.”

“Y-you don’t need this much!”

Passan declined to accept such a fortune, but Rudel forcefully had him grip. Looking over at Emilio, he showed no signs of opposing, instead giving a nod.

“Don’t worry about that, just buy enough for everyone. Take Pono with you.”

Saying that, Rudel moved to stand on the opposite side of Cleo from Izumi.

“U-um, it’s a bother, then...”

While Cleo sounded apologetic, Rudel shook his head to the side.

“No, I wanted to try it as well, so don’t worry. I deeply apologize for having you keep me company in my meal.”

When he spoke in a phrasing tactful towards the princess, Izumi and Millia made tired faces.

Millia even blatantly glared at him.

“... What’s wrong?”

“Nothing really. I just thought you were being refreshingly thoughtful.”

When Millia lifted her hair and said it, perhaps sensing the atmosphere, Passan and Pono headed off towards the stalls. Ben enviously saw off their backs.

As always, Cleo looked apologetic, so Emilio followed through.

“I’d appreciate if you left your spats for once you’ve returned to your own country. Right now is milady’s time.”

Millia turned to Cleo.

“My apologies, Milady.”

Hearing that, Cleo gave a bit of a lonesome laugh.

“No, it’s alright.”

At that moment, Passan and Pono returned, both their arms full of food.

“We’re back!”

“Passan, you bought way too much.”

Ben sighed. And Emilio naturally started off towards a place in the square where chairs and tables were lain out.

“Then let’s eat. Over here.”

(He’s used to this. Meaning the knights eat here? Despite that, I don’t see any around.)

Rudel couldn’t see any knights eating around.

He spotted quite a few soldiers on lookout, and he could see some soldiers having their meals. But he didn’t see any knights.

(Is it a problem with the timeslot?)

Rudel watched Cleo take a seat as he called out to Passan.

“Passan, do the knights eat in this area too?”

Taking a sidelong glance at Emilio, who even wore a hood, Rudel sought confirmation. Emilio was explaining to Cleo how to eat the various foods from the stalls.

Ben and Pono’s eyes were sparkling at the feast before their eyes.

Passan as well, and when Rudel struck up conversation, he troublesomely looked between Rudel and the food.

“There’s no way they’d come here. Even if they go on patrol, they get free meals at the castle. I’ve never heard of them showing up at these measly stalls.”

“But this is a sight-seeing spot, right? They never stretch their legs in the area and eat at the stalls?”

“Yeah, this might not be the best way to put it, but the mighty knights eat ‘t proper restaurants. This place is just right for the penniless soldiers to fill their stomachs... we’re thankful for it-no money and all-but once you get to be a knight, it’s looked down upon, er rather...”

Seeing how he struggled to say it, the knights likely avoided eating at the lowbrow food stalls.

(Do they look down on the food eaten by the masses? Quite a few of these are surprisingly delicious, but...)

Rudel’s wariness towards Emilio was instantly raised. But as things stood, he didn’t have any evidence. Even if he had his doubts, they were at a level where they’d clear up if the man gave an excuse.

A little suspicious, was all he thought.

“Passan, you can have mine. I’m fine with just one.”

Saying that, Rudel took one meat bun in hand and swiftly finished his meal. A delighted Passan brought the remaining bun over to Ben and oano.

“Boss, I got this from Boss Rudel!”

“Cheers. We’re having a feast today!”

“Thank you!”

Giving a bitter smile at the rejoicing three, Rudel went over to Izumi and sat down by her side. While he kept wary of his surroundings, he took care not to direct that towards Emilio.

Millia glared at the two of them, but he ignored her for now.

“Did something happen?”

Hearing Izumi’s whisper, it’s nothing definitive, he gave as a preface as he whispered back. Rudel himself only had a light off-feeling at best.

“It’s Emilio. Something feels off about him.”

“... I see.”

Without moving her eyes, she lent an ear to his words.

“This might not be so simple a request. Just keep that in mind.”

Saying that and standing, Rudel moved over to an adequate seat to guard Cleo.

Though they were in the middle of work, Ben’s party were deliciously digging into their meal. Cleo seemed to be having fun as she watched them.

She held a yearning towards plebian... things of differing status, to be more specific.

It wasn’t as if Rudel didn’t understand the feeling.

(Perhaps every royal family is complicated.)

There were plenty of strange points in this matter. He honestly couldn’t believe the reason they were called over was because the country’s own knights weren’t trusted.

(No use digging too deep into it. That’s not our job.)

Rudel changed his train of thought to focus on nothing but the mission. But as Cleo gave an innocent laugh as she listened in to Ben’s party’s conversations, he grew just a little curious.

Turning his eyes to Emilio, Rudel noticed.

(He’s smiling?)



Aleist had climbed to the roof of a building overlooking the center square.

To be more precise, Nate had led him there.

They both wore robes, weapons at the ready as they waited on standby.

Keeping her body low, Nate used her telescope to check the surroundings. When the sun was so high in the sky, the reason they didn’t stand out was because of the magic she was using.

Aleist recalled the magic and skills he didn’t use in-game.

(All the magic and skills I thought were useless, to think there were such

convenient uses for them. Even so, what is Nate doing?)

He had still yet to hear the reason Nate had come to Celestia. But Aleist had been led off from Courtois as her guard.

There had been some combat with those he suspected to be soldiers of the Gaia Empire.

(There's no doubt it's something troublesome. What is she looking at?)

Nate peered into the lens as she called over to Aleist. It was almost as if she had his thoughts in the palm of her hand.

"Are you curious about me, senpai?"

... But that was quite evidently a misunderstanding. There was no way Nate could understand how Aleist felt.

(Well, if she's noticed, I'd best not beat around the bush.)

Giving a bitter smile, Aleist offered Nate a correction.

"I'm pretty sure what I'm curious about is why we've come all the way to a foreign nation to do something like this. In the first place, you've yet to explain why we had to run away from that strange bunch."

While she heard out his take, Nate continued observing somewhere with her telescope. She continued gazing at what seemed to be the central square of the busy main road.

Perhaps she had found the target of her surveillance, as she didn't remove her eye.

"You're asking that now? I'd really prefer it if you either asked earlier, or stayed silent and showed some stoicism as you silently watched over me."

"That's not in my character. If you don't like that, hurry up and find a boyfriend, and marry them alongside your graduation."

"Uwah... senpai, you're terrible. After you did such a thing to me."

Such a thing, meaning when Aleist was pushed down. It was in his student days. Dropping by the graduation party, Aleist ran smack dab into Nate, who was handing out drinks, and she ended up pushing him down.

“I was the victim there, wasn’t I? And It really was hell back then.”

Recalling his school days, Aleist breathed out a sigh as he slumped his shoulders.

“Senpai, I don’t want to be the one to say it, but there aren’t many students out there who enjoyed their school life as much as you. Surrounded by cute girls, with friends and rivals... it was the best, wasn’t it? If that’s what makes you sigh, the gods are going to punish you.”

Aleist had an ample understanding of Nate’s words.

It was a fact he truly did have some fun. He was fulfilled.

But...

“I confessed to the girl I like, and I still haven’t gotten a response. No, that’s already, how should I put it, yeah, hopeless, but see...”

“Hah, are you so unsatisfied with a cute girl like me?”

As Nate called herself cute, Aleist averted his eyes and muttered.

“I think the part where you praised yourself is no good. Are you overly self-conscious?”

Nate lifted the telescope up and hit it into Aleist’s head. Was it really alright to use an expensive article in such a manner, Aleist thought as he robbed his head.

“It’s embarrassing for me to say it too. This sort of, I’d like if you were more mindful of a maiden’s heart. It’s just the two of us, so shouldn’t it be fine if there was a bit of a better atmosphere between us? Like, when I call myself cute, you could at least say, ‘You definitely are cute, Nate’.”

Nate’s face reddened in embarrassment, but...

“That sounds like a pain.”

Aleist bluntly called it troublesome only to be smacked by the telescope again. Seeing Nate silently smack him with her face still red, Aleist...

(Ah, she might actually be a little cute when she’s embarrassed.)

Ended up thinking even Nate had some cute parts to her. Due to the

abundance of violent members in his harem, even if she hit him, he ended up seeing it as cute.



While they spend time in the central square, the time to return to the palace approached.

The flow of people had also begun to change, with the pedestrian traffic gradually lessening off.

But there, Emilio moved.

“Milady, would you like to see the famed spot of Celestia? It’s not too far from central square, so we can still make it in time.”

“A famed spot? I’ve never heard of it.”

Cleo looked at Ben, but the party of three tilted their heads.

“Was there a spot like that around here? In this area, I guess you could call the central square a famed spot, but...”

As Pono crossed his arms in thought, Emilio went into somewhat forceful negotiations.

“Those in the know, know it well. Though to people without lovers, it might be irrelevant.”

Hearing of lovers, the three nodded.

“So it’s one of those date spots? Sure enough, it wouldn’t be strange if we’ve never heard of it!”

While Ben gave a grand laugh, Passan continued tilting his head.

Rudel approached Passan and tried asking what was on his mind.

“Is something bothering you?”

“I’m not sure if you know, but in these parts, center square is a tourist site so there are soldiers. But go just a little away and the public order isn’t too good. Even if you say it’s a date spot, I’m not really seeing it... well, I don’t have a girlfriend, so maybe I just don’t know about it.”

Seeing Cleo being led off by Emilio, her face had turned a little red at the words date spot.

As she took some fleeting glances at Rudel, Emilio went into effective persuasion.

“Why don’t you take one last visit there with Rudel-dono?”

Hearing Rudel’s name, Cleo thought a bit and nodded.

“You’re right. If we can be back in no time, at the very end, at least...”

A little. She said and consented. Emilio led her. But it was at that moment.

“Kyaaaaah!!”

Alongside a woman’s scream, they heard the sound of a building or stall being broken. A portion of a blown-away stand flew towards Rudel as well.

“Stand back!”

Saying that, Rudel drew his sword and cut down what was coming his way.

Izumi and Millia rushed over to Cleo’s side, while the party of three panicked, unable to take immediate action.

Emilio issued orders to them.

“Ben, take your men and go check around the square. Head straight towards the noise and see if the enemy is still there.”

“Eh, oh, yes!”

As Ben instantly ran off, Rudel instantly closed in on Emilio.

He could no longer think his off feeling was a misunderstanding.

“Hold it. How do you know it’s an enemy?”

Drawing his sword, he didn’t hesitate to direct the tip at Emilio.

There was definitely a ruckus. But Rudel’s group had yet to find out the slightest detail on what had happened. Despite that, Emilio had concluded and proclaimed a clear enemy.

Izumi and Millia also quickly entered the space between Cleo and Emilio, readying their weapons. But they were swallowed up by the wave of people

running away.

“Princess!”

While Izumi raced towards Cleo, a large mass fell from above. Then another, and another. In the gap Izumi used to direct her eyes up, Emilio made his move.

(This is bad!)

Rudel was sure Emilio would cut Izumi down. He determined those somethings that came from the sky were his allies.

But Emilio ignored Izumi entirely.

“Wait!”

Swallowed whole by the flowing crowd, Millia couldn't approach Cleo.

“Emilio, why are you doing something like this!?”

“Shut up and follow me!”

Her hand forcefully grasped by Emilio, Cleo glared and put up resistance. Unfortunately, the difference in power was too great, and her resistance ended in futility.

Around the residence still ran to flee, and with his movements sealed off, those falling masses surrounded Rudel.

Those round bodies looked as if they were made from a sphere crushed flat, with four thick legs attached. Their single red eyes let off a light, their earthen surfaces...

“I don't know what's going on... but it doesn't look like these are the guardian deity.”

Similar to the ornaments sold at the souvenir shop, those objects that exceeded two meters across surrounded Rudel's party, locking them in with their eyes.

Within all that, Emilio alone was able to run freely, dragging Cleo by the hand.

Millia drew back her bow, but as if to protect him, the masses moved to block her line of sight.

“Looks like these things are that Emilio’s comrades.”

At Millia’s vexed words, Izumi also drew her katana and took a stance.

“I’d like to give chase asap, but...”

The masses that showed no intent to let them through moved mechanically like dolls. Surrounding Rudel’s party of three, they looked like they would attack at any moment.

One step... Izumi tread in, and sent a slash flying at a doll. She had determined the surroundings had finally become scarce enough for her to exert her strength.

And stirring ever so slightly, the doll’s torso was severed from its legs.

That clean-cut revealed-practically like the idols up for sale-its insides were empty.

“What’s with these things.”

Finding the empty dolls uncanny, she tried thinking of them as golems produced with magic and tried looking around. While her eyes had always been good, she couldn’t spot any magician controlling them.

For dolls made out of earth, their surfaces were almost like earthenware. Appart from the severed portion, she could see cracked places as well.

But they weren’t strong. Rudel thought it would be fine if they just cut them all down, but the doll’s dislocated limbs quickly crept up to their original positions, fastened themselves on, and set the thing moving again.

“Now that’s troublesome.”

Rudel took a stance with his sword as he said that, when Izumi sent a shockwave flying to make a path. Turning, she spoke to Rudel.

Her ponytail swayed, and as she looked over her shoulder, Izumi’s form made for a pretty picture.

“Go ahead, you two. If we don’t carry out the mission, it will affect Courtois’ reputation.”

“At the moment she was kidnapped, our reputation was lost. But if that’s how

it's going to be, I'll be going ahead."

"Eh? We're really leaving her here alone? Hey, Rudel!"

Millia voiced her opposition to leaving Izumi behind.

But Rudel made a prompt decision, ignored the dolls in the process of regeneration, and chased after Cleo.

"Aaaah, whatever!"

Millia followed behind, protruding wings of magic from her back and chasing after Rudel.

If a doll tried to follow, a slash would fly from behind, slicing it into pieces. But as if that was pointless, the dolls regenerated one after the next.

Even so Rudel left it to Izumi.

(Now then, that means me and Millia will have to take Emilio on, but expecting only a single enemy would be too optimistic.)

The two chasing Emilio, who had entered an alley from the main road, kept the possibility of an ambush in mind as they proceeded on.



"Now then."

Having let Rudel go ahead, once the backs of the two were out of sight, Izumi sheathed her katana into its scabbard.

It wasn't that she didn't have the intent to fight. She had determined that cutting them would take way too much time.

She undid the thread that bound her scabbard to her belt. Taking the sheath in her hand, she leapt right above the doll that tried moving going after the other two.

"You're not getting away."

Pulling the sheath halfway down the blade, the moment its end touched the enemy, she hammered her sword back into it with good momentum.

The doll was slammed into the ground, shattering beyond the realm of repair.

Her jump clearing the top of the shattered doll, Izumi observed the state of her enemy.

“So they don’t regenerate if you break them enough. Then I’ll be destroying the lot of them.”

Izumi ran straight towards the remaining dolls, and as if they had a form of will, the dolls began to retreat.

But knowing from their movements they couldn’t output much speed, Izumi wasn’t going to let them get away.

She took another leap and destroyed another doll.

The ground she slammed it into caved in slightly from the impact.

(I’ve had Captain Bennet teach me a lot of things, but it seems I’ve at least managed to make one of them my own.)

It was a technique she learned to deal with enemies where slashes weren’t the most effective.

As Rudel and the others went ahead, Izumi learned it to chase after him, if only by a single step.

“It’s my first time using it in real combat, but this is a good opportunity.”

Izumi muttered as she went on destroying the dolls that continued to gather in the center square.



Having fled into an alleyway, Emilio stopped in his tracks.

After running through those maze-like back alleys without going astray, he carefully set down Cleo, who he had hoisted under his left arm. She had thrashed along the way, but by this point, she was slumped without resisting.

As she took a seat, Emilio spoke.

“We’re still moving. Your clothes will be soiled if you sit there.”

“... Why did you turn coat?”

It was a feeble voice, but he heard it resound through the alley. He could hear

the distant sounds of battle, but nothing else.

There, a woman's voice called out.

"This is troublesome, Emilio-dono. It's troubling for you to do such unnecessary things."

What Cleo saw as she lifted her head was the maid who had looked after her. She was wearing her maid uniform, but her atmosphere was different than usual.

"W-why are you here..."

Cleo didn't want to believe it. The maid was carrying such a friendly conversation with Emilio. Which meant...

"What a dull woman. Well, such a thing shouldn't be a problem for bait, so I've no complaints. I was able to have a laugh over how you thought of me as a friend, and your pitiful environment was interesting enough to watch, so I'll forgive you."

As the maid imparted her such words with a smile, Cleo's thoughts couldn't catch up.

But no matter how she recollected, that was definitely the face of the girl who had listened to what she had to say so warmly.

"You don't have to look so conflicted. You're only bait, after all. Now then, if we keep the higherups waiting, they'll be angry. Take her away already, Emilio-dono."

Seeing the maid turn from a smile to an uncanny grin, Cleo didn't know what to believe in anymore.

"T-tomorrow, I have to..."

"I know. That's why we're stopping that. Would it kill for you to be just a little thankful to me for taking care of mere feed?"

A tear flowed along Cleo's face.

There, Emilio approached the maid.

"Emilio-dono, if you let go of her hands, the bait will run aw... eh?"

Having drawn his sword as they were on the run, Emilio still held it firmly in his right hand. With a big step forward, he swung it from his top right to bottom left.

The maid was surprised, but having trained in some martial arts, she instantly leapt back. She glared at Emilio in rage.

In her, Cleo could see no trace of the kind woman who told her tales of a common life.

“What are you doing, you rotten knight!!?”

Drawing the knife she concealed in her skirt, this time the maid jumped at Emilio. But...

“H-huh...”

The moment she stepped in, blood burst from her right shoulder down to her left hip. As if she had been cut through...

“Have you forgotten how I climbed my way up the knight brigade?”

“B-bastard... you trash upstart knight. Do you think it’ll end with this!?”

Spitting blood from her mouth, the maid raised her voice.

“I don’t. But you see, you guys make me sick. Disappear.”

Emilio’s previous tone disappeared, his words becoming a little rough. He stuck his saber into the maid to land the finishing blow.

“Emilio, you’re...”

As Cleo said that, Emilio turned and made a sorrowful face. But at the same time, a little happy... as if his expression was trying to tell her something.

While he had been so rough a moment before, his tone towards Cleo was kind.

“Don’t worry, you’re going to be free soon, Cleo.”

Extra: Songstress 8

“What are you talking about, Emilio?”

Cleo sat down in the narrow back alley, looking at the young man before her eyes.

Her guard, a young and powerful knight of the Kingdom of Celestia, was gripping the sword in his right hand. From its tip, the blood of the maid-Cleo’s personal caretaker-he had killed fell drop by drop.

Cleo couldn’t hear the distant clamor.

The maid she had believed in, who she had known for so many years had scorned her all the way.

The knight she had believed in presented her hand out to her.

“Cleo, this is enough. There’s no need for you to become a sacrifice anymore. Let’s run from here. The preparations are already in order.”

Emilio slowly approached, extending out his left hand. Cleo moved her eyes to look between that hand and his face.

“What are you talking about, Emilio? If I don’t undergo the ceremony tomorrow, the country will be...”

In her dismay, Cleo couldn’t properly process the situation. This was largely due to the betrayal of the maid she thought of as a friend, who would tell her all about the castle town and life as a commoner. But even more than that, she couldn’t believe Emilio when he told her to run from the ceremony.

... She had lived her life for tomorrow’s ritual...

To Cleo, that was the very meaning of her existence. Even if she knew she was going to die, if it was for the sake of the country... she thought. No, she was taught.

But she did find the extended left hand to be captivating.

(If I follow Emilio, will I be saved?)

It was to her, what could be called the devil's temptation. No one ever truly wanted to die. And up until the attack from the dolls just before, Cleo had been able to spend a happy time. That only amplified her desire to live on.

(I want to live. But...)

Cleo brushed away Emilio's left hand with her right.

Glaring at him as he opened his eyes wide, Cleo spoke.

"Stand down. This body is one I have pledged to Celestia. Following you is something... I cannot do."

She was highly confused, but she barely managed to stop herself without losing to temptation. Rage, or perhaps irritation, she didn't know what to expect from Emilio, but the man simply made a sad face and smiled.

"I see. You've grown strong, Cleo. But I have my own obstinacy."

Emilio reached out his left hand to forcefully take her arm. But in the next instant, he turned his back to Cleo, taking a stance with his saber.

In the depths of the alleyway, before she had noticed it, there stood three in robes. Cleo hadn't sensed the slightest hint of their approach.

A robed man who stood just a step ahead of the three let his muddled voice resound through the space. That somewhat low voice was one she couldn't believe belonged to a human. Not a sound of life. It held a mechanical, inorganic something.

But that voice did manage to hold some emotions Cleo couldn't see herself taking to.

"This is different from what we arranged. Were you not going to hand the princess to us? This isn't the delivery point, traitor to Celestia."

The man who declared Emilio a traitor produced a barbed sword from under his robe. He took out two. Those two thorny blades gave off a purple hue in the dark back alley. As with the sword in Emilio's hands, they didn't even give off a dull reflective glow.

"... I lost my way. There was a slight blunder on my part."

Still readying his saber, Emilio hadn't dropped his guard. He was saying things completely different from before. Cleo thought, but she could tell his voice was nervous.

"J-just what could..."

On the voice Cleo rung out, the men to both sides of the double-bladed man sprung to action. Quickly, as if they were running across the wall, they leapt out towards Cleo.

"You imperial bastards!"

Giving a statement as if he had previously been working with them, Emilio swung his blade at the two. But one of them stopped his sword. And the other came at Cleo without the slightest hesitation.

"Run, Cleo!"

Emilio loudly worried for her safety, but the girl in question couldn't even stand from where she was.

"Ah..."

From the hood of the robe, she looked into her assailant's face. They wore a mask with round spectacle-like somethings stuck on. They gleamed like red eyes, and in the gloom of the alley, they looked oh so ominous.

The hand reaching out, unlike Emilio's, was clothed as if violently wrapped in rubber. That hand that somewhat smelled of oil extended towards Cleo.

But...

"That's as far as you go."

... A gust blew through the back-alley.



Just in the nick of time.

Running down the complex maze-like alleys, Rudel was relieved to find he had made it in time. High-speed movement in a layout he didn't know took more concentration than he thought, and he wasn't able to pursue Cleo as well as he expected.

Placing himself in front of her the moment he spotted her, Rudel swung his sword.

Cutting through the suspicious arm reaching out towards Cleo, he entered the space between her and the suspicious man. He instantly kicked the robed figure away, but he felt something was off.

(Oil? And the sense I got from that kick was bizarre.)

He surely lopped off an arm, but the stump wasn't bleeding. In exchange, a liquid-presumably oil-lightly dripped. With the cut as well, he didn't get the sensation he was cutting through flesh.

"Rudel-dono."

Cleo called out but Rudel didn't turn back to her. Taking a stance with his sword, he spoke.

"Please stay behind me. It does seem this is a dangerous bunch."

The man he kicked away stoop. From the severed right hand, as he thought, not blood but oil sprinkled the ground.

The robed one with the barbed swords who was probably the leader raised a cloudy, mechanical laugh.

"Kukuku, I never thought I would run into such a big shot here. It is a pleasure, Dragoon... no, Rudel Arses-kun."

Rudel kept on guard as he strained his ears to hear.

"Looks like you know about me. It's an honor for one of far-off lands... no, the empire to know my name."

In the space of that light conversation, Emilio parted from the enemy, no it felt more like both sides retreated. The man before Rudel's eyes also back stepped as he returned to his comrades. On his movements, Rudel noticed the identity of his off-feeling.

(The empire's machine soldiers?)

Machine soldiers... soldiers of the empire who compensated for their lost limbs with animated metal. He knew they moved by means of magic, but it was

a technology not found in the kingdom. By their uncanniness, they were often shunned and left the dirty work of the empire, he had heard at the academy.

“I see, so I’ve got some eyes on me.”

To Rudel’s words, the leaderish man replied.

“You humble yourself. Your existence is one much too radiant for us. So radiant we must envy, and detest to such we can never forgive. I especially so, for it was a dragoon who took away my arms and legs.”

So he was a machine soldier who lost his limbs in combat with a dragoon. There was no doubt whatever was under his robes had been left in a terrible state.

“We have taken up a nonaggressive defense policy. You are the ones one-sidedly invading.”

The kingdom of Courtois lay on rich, fertile land. There was no merit to be found in making a march on the empire. But the empire had been pressed into a circumstance where they had to invade even if they were going against dragoons.

“How young. Your youth is also enviable.”

From under the hood, three red dots let off a faint light. Rudel stood and took a position to protect Cleo from the four. The robed group before him... and Emilio.

Emilio had led his three soldiers in a wrong direction so he could flee into the alleys alone with Cleo. That was the main reason for Rudel’s wariness. His final actions made it doubly sure.

Rudel saw Emilio as an enemy. Emilio also seemed to understand that, but sandwiched between Rudel and the robed men, he couldn’t freely move around the narrow alley.

“When I’ve come so far.”

Regretfully... his face grimaced as his eyes darted to Rudel and the robed men.

“Kukuku, quite the ill-prepared knight you are. It speaks volumes to the

nature of Celestia. To think this man would be one of the knights representing the country... now then, we shall be resuming our work. We've done a splendid job biding time."

As he said that, two robed men jumped down from the rooves of the buildings enclosing the space.

As Rudel grabbed Cleo under his left arm and jumped back, he narrowed his eyes as he looked at the situation.

"They managed to slip this many in?"

Just with a quick check, he could sense ten presences around. Was there a problem with Celestia's security, or were these guys just good at their jobs... perhaps it was both.

"You're too careless. When the enemy starts speaking, you'd best think they're trying to buy time... of course, you didn't have too many options to choose from. A dragoon without a dragon is just a normal knight. Kill them."

Losing interest, the three-eyed man issued orders to his men in an emotionless voice. But Rudel laughed just a bit.

"Your words do me ill."

With those words, he squatted with Cleo still under his arm. Three arrows passed above his head, the three-eyed man used the swords in both his hands to block them.

It was Millia.

Wings of magic spread out from her back. She took on an archer's stance, and with her next arrow, a robed man poised with a crossbow fell from the roof.

"Rudel, you rushed out too far ahead!"

"My bad. But that timing wasn't bad, Millia."

To Rudel, these weren't numbers he was unable to deal with. But with Cleo so close, he couldn't exhibit his full strength. By Millia's arrival, Rudel was sure the risk factor behind fighting his way through had decreased.

"Cleo!"

Emilio cried out as he took on the three-eyed man's subordinate coming at him. Parrying his opponent's sword, he used his left hand to draw a knife from his breast-pocket and take a slash. Perhaps his opponent was an elite as they jumped back to dodge.

But blood poured out of the mask the robed man used to breathe as he collapsed. Seeing that, the three-eyed man clicked his tongue.

"An elf, eh... and the Celestian knight isn't bad. Well, even so, he wouldn't get far in the empire. Everyone come at them."

Renewing his grip on his two swords, he issued orders to his men. Millia skipped around the space, kicking from wall to wall, firing arrows at the men. What were simple arrows stuck in deeply as they stuck into the walls and ground, but the robed men ran dodged through the volley as they encroached upon Rudel.

"... Sorry, but this is part of my job."

Saying that, Rudel entrusted Cleo to Millia, who had come close enough, and cut down one of the robed men coming at him.

The sensation of cutting through metal and flesh was something Rudel had never experienced before. But he hadn't the time to be flustered by it.

The three-eyed man ran as he issued orders.

"I'll take on the dragoon. You lot get the traitor and princ—"

Just as he had said that much, this time the robed men with bows began to fall from the roof. As they hit the ground, they let off metallic sounds.

Rudel looked at the two who descended the next instant and dispelled the magic storing up in his left hand. He had considered sending them flying with magic, but the ones who came down did seem to be allies.

"Good grief, my encounter rate with the underside of the Kingdom and Empire is especially high today. (That's totally Aleist, but I probably shouldn't point that out.)"

Wearing masks, the robed party of two stood in front of Rudel, and one answered him without turning her head.

“Would you mind leaving this to us? Your mission is to guard the princess; this one is our mission.”

Rudel sent a glance at Emilio, but in his order of precedence, he had to prioritize Cleo. He had no need to fixate on the enemies before his eyes. What's more, Millia had already taken her and left. It was possible there were other enemies in hiding.

“Then they're all yours.”

Saying that, Rudel swiftly left the spot. A strong wind blew, and in the next instant, he was gone.



“... His strength exceeds the rumors. He might be even more troublesome than he was in his school days, Senpai.”

Draping over the robe and mask Nate handed over, Aleist looked at the surrounding situation and shook.

Wearing black robes, those men with round and red spectacles peeking out of their hoods for eyes.

(What's this supposed to mean... seriously, what!?)

The reason he was so surprised lay in Nate's prompt order to get ready as she led him barreling from rooftop to rooftop. By the time he noticed it, he was being attacked, a battle unfolded, and on top of that, he had rushed to Rudel's aid.

“Dogs of the Kingdom, is it. No, perhaps it's more accurate to call you washouts.”

A man whose mask boasted three eyes called over to Aleist and Nate. Around, Emilio and the robed men were on high alert.

... Meaning they were surrounded.

“Now go do your best, Senpai.”

Letting out a bit of a cute voice, Nate went right ahead to push the impossible onto Aleist. She told him to take on the group surrounding them and directing

so much killing intent.

“Wait a second! Telling me to take on this many foes, no matter how you look at it, that’s strange! That’s strange, isn’t it!?”

“Yeah, yeah, enough with the jokes. Just go do your best. You’re my guard, aren’t you? You said you’d help me, didn’t you?”

“No, I did! I definitely said it! I just never thought it would come to this!”

“I want to see you at your coolest. Don’t make me say it, how embarrassing.”

“Even if you act embarrassed, you’re not cute at all!”

The exchange between the masked duo, if there was a third party present, surely they would have opened their eyes in surprise. It was a comedy skit one might think would continue forever, but fed-up after all, the three-eyed man stuck in his mouth.

“Good grief, you people have no sense of tension... well then, once you’re out of the way, we’ll be nabbing the princess.”

With a light wave of his jaw, his nearby subordinates charged at Aleist. But...

“...!? The texture when you cut into them is creepy!!”

The moment Aleist drew his own weapons, he cut apart the robed men coming at him. He had clearly cut them before they came into the range of his sword, bringing a complete change to the surrounding reactions.

The three-eyed man let out a wary voice.

“A fellow twin sword user. And a skilled one at that. How troublesome... how truly troublesome. Slaying him here might be in the empire’s best interest.”

With those words he had his subordinates step down and rushed at Aleist himself.

On the other side, Nate jumped away from Aleist as she spoke.

“Have at it, Senpai! I’ll be guarding your back.”

“No, fight alongside me! These people look terrifying!”

Even as he cried out, he didn’t take his eyes off of the three-eyed man before

his eyes. He instinctually understood that would prove fatal.

Aleist's swords met with that of his foes.

And seeing the enemy up close, Aleist felt like something was coming back to him.

(Ah, could this guy be...)

Extra: Songstress 9

Aleist was a reincarnator.

He had been reborn into the world of a romance-themed game, carrying over the knowledge from when he played it.

Yet Aleist had no memory of a country called Celestia making an appearance. It wasn't even that it existed in setting alone.

Wearing similar robes to the masked group he fought, Aleist thought to himself.

(I didn't think they'd come to another country. But why am I fighting this guy in a place like this.)

The 'this guy' Aleist referred to was the man holding two barbed swords before his eyes.

The man who used two blades just as he did, Aleist knew him.

(Gaia's assassination unit, was it? No, I believe they called them the special forces, but...)

Both sides swung about two swords freely, contesting with their number of cards to play.

Around the men who seemed to be enemy grunts surrounded Aleist.

(If you count the Celestia knight, we only have three.)

While he had inherited an overwhelming disadvantage from Rudel, he couldn't be negligent with the enemy before his eyes.

Of all else, the three-eyed man before him was a character who appeared in the game.

Leading the mechanized unit that headed Gaia's special forces, he was a character without a name. Aleist remembered him appearing in a number of combat events.

His main characteristics had to be the special means of attacks he gained from

his mechanization.

“This is troublesome.”

In a muddled voice, the three-eyed man who called Aleist troublesome leapt back to take a set distance.

Seeing that, a shiver raced down Aleist’s spine.

He instantly used magic as he jumped back.

(Crap!)

As he protruded tens of black spears from the ground, a number of them immediately shattered.

He crossed his swords to receive what impact remained of his enemy’s attack.

“You stopped it? You’re the second one I’ve ever met who’s been able to stop it the first time they saw that attack. You can be proud of yourself... black knight.”

Kukuku, or so the three-eyed man burst into laughter.

He turned up and lifted the back portion of his robe to show the sharp blade attached to the tip of the tail furnished on.

A tail of coiled metal wiring, Aleist quickly determined it would be dangerous and destroyed it with his sword before it could retract.

But his foe shoed some leisure.

“This truly is a wonderful feeling. For my sure-kill blow to be stopped... Black knight, I think I’ll add you to my list.”

“List? And what list would that be?”

Aleist asked out of curiosity but instantly found himself regretting it.

“The list of individuals I want to land the final blow on personally! Be proud. I’ll put you in at second place. Ahahaha—”

Said he as he sprang up.

The enemy grunts, as if to follow, raced their way up the wall.

The black-robed group ran, they jumped... it wasn’t a pleasant sight to see.

“... He must be quite the dangerous one.”

While his face stiffened, Aleist was relieved the enemy had pulled back when a voice called from behind. It was Nate.

“Senpai, you’ve earned the affection of someone outrageous. That guy, even if he looks like that, he’s the top of the Imperial mechanized unit’s applied theory division.”

“Is that it? That’s who he was supposed to be?”

Even his title didn’t appear in the game, and Aleist only saw him as a troublesome foe.

And now he had been recognized as the person that individual wanted to kill second-most.

(Then who’s number one... and wait...)

At the end of his fleeting glance was the green haired man Nate directed her dagger at. Before what appeared to be a knight of Celestia, Aleist didn’t know what he was supposed to do.

Nate kept wary as she spoke.

“Now then, I’ll have you explain yourself, Emilio-dono. When you’ve already called out to Courtois, I never imagined you’d invoke accursed Gaia as well.”

Nate’s voice was lower than usual, becoming one to threaten the other party.

In regards to the knight called Emilio, Aleist was wary as well.

But their foe showed no signs of resistance. Forget resistance, he tossed his sword aside and sat on the spot.

The alley floor is filthy... Aleist thought when Emilio opened his mouth.

“I never thought it would go well. It’s just, if the possibility existed, I had no choice but to cling to it. Otherwise, Cleo... my little sister would be...”

Covering his face with his right hand, Emilio grit his teeth.

“Little sister? By Cleo, you mean the princess of this country, don’t you?”

Aleist tilted his head in wonder.

Nate saw her opponent had no will to resist and tucked away her dagger. She decided to hear out Emilio's circumstance.

"Based on the situation, taking you out here is my role. It seems you have some circumstances... so why don't you tell us about it?"

Emilio spoke after letting out a sigh.

"Do what you will, is what I'd like to say, but I will be putting up a last-ditch effort."

Nate entered negotiations.

"I said based on the situation. If there's profit to be had on our side, I'm saying we might just cooperate with you."

There, Emilio indifferently started into the present state of Celestia's underbelly.

"If it's in my possession, be it information or anything else, go ahead and take it. I'm fine as long as Cleo is saved. That's my mother's wish."

So Aleist got to learn the truth of Celestia.



Having saved Cleo and returned to the palace, Rudel was summoned to the king's room.

In regards to this incident, the king proclaimed he would carry out the questioning himself.

There were many points beyond his understanding, and this was a foreign land, so Rudel paid it little mind as he spoke the plain truth.

About the attack, about the combat with a unit from the Gaia Empire, and about Emilio's betrayal.

But he decided to cover up Aleist's involvement.

Hearing all that, the king's spoke without a change in expression.

"So Emilio was an enemy spy... good grief, how disappointing."

A prominent knight of his own country was colluding with the enemy. It was

no laughable matter.

(Even so, he doesn't look at all panicked. Is it because the princess is safe?)

Rudel felt something off at the king's attitude, but he decided to confirm his future plans.

"Will there be any change to our mission?"

There, the king spoke without looking at Rudel.

"None. You are to depart tomorrow as scheduled. There is no need to pay mind to anything else. Tell Cleo it will all go as planned."

This wasn't the attitude of a parent giving a final farewell.

The one before him was a foreign king.

Rudel's position was not one to stick his mouth into foreign affairs.

But...

"She was betrayed by those closes to her. From what I've heard, Emilio had accomplices as well, correct? The princess must be feeling—"

"What a human set for death feels bears no relevance. Is that all you wanted to say?"

Rudel glared at the king who wouldn't hear his opinion.

He wasn't scared. But Rudel did feel within him, this was much too sad of an attitude from a father.

(Is it really possible to be this cold to his child?)



Cleo sat on the bed of her own room.

Absentmindedly gazing out the window, she recalled the words of her closest friend, the servant who deceived her.

'What a dull woman. Well, such a thing shouldn't be a problem for bait, so I've no complaints. I was able to have a laugh over how you thought of me as a friend, and your pitiful environment was interesting enough to watch, so I'll forgive you.'

In the narrow world she lived in, the maid would teach her all about the world outside.

It was always a fun time for Cleo. The food at the stands, the events of the castle town, she was the reason Cleo longed for it so.

“So I never had any friends...”

While she felt sad, Cleo turned it around.

“It’s better the fewer people there are to be saddened by my loss.”

It was a little sad but even so, she had a duty to fulfill. If she did that, then surely, the smiles of many people would be protected.

Cleo convinced herself as her tears flowed.



Rudel left guard detail to Izumi and Millia as he prepared himself for tomorrow.

Calling Sakuya to the palace courtyard, he prepared to take Cleo to the destination point.

To Rudel, who didn’t seem up for it at all, Sakuya let out her voice. Thought rather than a voice, it was a telepathic something Rudel could hear.

If looked at from the side, it looked as if Rudel was talking to himself.

‘Are you worrying, Rudel?’

“Pardon? Ah... I probably am.”

Rudel had been given a mission as a knight of Courtois. More than his own personal feelings, he was there under orders to accomplish the mission.

He didn’t agree with it, but if it was an order, it couldn’t be helped.

“My order from the higherups was to complete the request of Celestia’s king. I will take Cleo to the destination point. I’ll be counting on you tomorrow, Sakuya.”

While he spoke of expectations, Rudel’s expression was cloudy.

He didn’t know himself.

(If I lead Cleo there, that's where she'll die.)

No matter how it was phrased, Cleo was a sacrificial lamb to protect Celestia. That was the country's custom, and something that had carried on for many years.

A complaint from Rudel wouldn't get anywhere.

"If you don't want to, you could just not."

Sakuya was a holder of a young soul. If you don't want to do it, then don't. She offered Rudel such a simple answer.

Giving a bitter smile, Rudel replied.

"If I could do that, it would be so much easier. I'll prioritize the mission."

'Cleo will die.'

Sakuya had taken a liking to Cleo.

The girl had sung to her in her pretty song voice. It had to be a talent bestowed on Cleo from the heavens.

(If she wasn't born as royalty... no, there's no point thinking of possibilities.)

Rudel also admired her song.

"... It's a mission. Tomorrow, we will guard Cleo along the way to the destination point."



Alongside Nate, Aleist listened to Emilio's story at the inn.

"What's with that... what the hell's with that!?"

Standing from his chair, Aleist raised his voice. That was simply how terrible the contents he heard from Emilio must have been.

"Senpai, how about we calm down."

"Do you think I can stay calm!? Destroying a whole country for personal grudge is crazy!"

The one surprised at Aleist's outburst was Emilio.

Nate wasn't making the best face either. But it wasn't as if she was particularly angry.

What Emilio told them of was the starting point, an incident ten years prior.

"The person he liked was offered as a sacrifice? And because Cleo's mother made it so, he had the girl live a miserable life in the castle? She's his own child, is she not!"

What Aleist learned was the fact Cleo's birth mother wasn't the queen. And Emilio's identity was a prince of this country.

At present, he was officially dead, but even so, he was a male who carried the blood of the king.

Of course, Emilio himself was raised in the slums, but that wasn't to say he would've been better off if he stayed.

"I didn't think you would get so angry. But now you understand, right? Cleo must not be led to the altar. The shackles on that ancient weapon are growing weak. If she's taken there, that excrement will use her to set it in motion and destroy this country. And that isn't all... if it loses its restraints, it'll head to other countries as well."

An ancient weapon, that was the identity of the guardian deity.

Who made it for what? At this point, even the royal family didn't have the answer to that one, said Emilio.

But giving it a shape through the volcano's energy, it was bound and used as a weapon.

"I don't know its exact value as a weapon. They say it once had the dragoons step down, but seeing how we didn't go on the offensive ourselves, it must have some limitations. What's more important to Celestia is its byproduct effect of controlling the volcanoes."

The main worth of the ancient weapon lay in how it stored up energy from the volcanoes, preventing eruption. The fact that cities could be built so close to active volcanoes was because of its grace.

But living so close to volcanoes carried just that many risks. And if there was a

means to control those volcanoes?

The answer was simple.

The royal house of Celestia presented sacrifices to keep it under their control.

“A woman of the royal line, rather a blue-haired woman is necessary. Presenting the women to maintain control over it is how this country works.”

A question came to Aleist’s head.

He tried asking.

“Wait a second. Does this country have the necessary craft to keep it under control? And why does it have to be a blue-haired woman?”

But Emilio’s answer...

“Like hell I know. It’s been like that for a long time. There are some records of trial and error, but they concluded someone from the blue-haired tribe that used to inhabit these parts is necessary. Cleo’s part of the tribe, the royal line took in their blood to make a show that they were performing their obligation to the people... this place can go to hell.”

At Emilio’s words, Aleist didn’t know what he should say.

(What’s going on? And presenting a sacrifice lets you control the weapon? I don’t get it.)

In place of Aleist’s worries, this time Nate asked.

“So you intended to create chaos by calling in Courtois and Gaia, and use the mess to flee over the border? That’s quite the grand scheme you have there.”

To a fed-up Nate, Emilio cried out.

“I didn’t have any time! It took quite the effort to become a knight, and when I was finally high up enough to approach her, Cleo was going to be offered as sacrifice! I’m hanging by a thread here, you know that!”

Emilio had become a knight to save her, but by that time Cleo’s sacrifice was upon them.

With no time to spare, he did all that was within his power. Of course, that ended in failure.

“... By the way, after you saved that Cleo-san (?) What did you intend to do? Played poorly, and wouldn't you have an uncontrollably rampaging ancient weapon on your hands, or something like that?”

Emilio didn't shy back from Aleist's question.

“Who knows? That's none of my business. Why should I care about the people who affirmed our sacrifices and killed our clan generation after generation for their own sake?”

Aleist grasped Emilio's lapels and lifted them up.

“You're...!”

Nate breathed a sigh as she mediated and had the two sit.

“Give it a rest already. This talk isn't getting anywhere. Senpai, endure it. And Emilio-dono, don't rile him up. You know full well your time is limited.”

On Nate's words, Emilio lifted his hips.

“Then you'll save Cleo!?”

She shook her head.

“We are not here to save her. Courtois shares a border with Celestia. And Gaia's special forces are moving around. I don't want to give them any information. Good grief, if you just called us alone, it would've been so much easier.”

As Nate spilled complaints, Emilio averted his gaze.

He was just a little ashamed of his lack of foresight.

“So anyways, what are you going to do, senpai? I'm going to go ahead on my own from here on out, but you're free to participate. Ah, but! If you help out, you'll raise my affection points!”

Nate touched a hand to her face, taking a pose as she sent a glance at Aleist. But Aleist handled brushed her aside and looked at Emilio.

“... What?”

“I have a condition. I don't want to have any casualties. I want to make it so the princess can be saved, and no one has to die after that. If that's how it's

going to be, I'll provide as much help as you want."

At the condition Aleist presented, Emilio looked amazed.

"Are you stupid? If something like that was possible, someone would be doing it."

"Senpai, you're so soft. Though I do like that part of you."

Ignoring Nate's statement, Aleist looked at Emilio. At his serious gaze, Emilio violently ruffled up his own hair.

"Tsk, we'll have the residents evacuate. I don't know if the ancient weapon can be stopped, after all. Rather, even I can't tell you what'll happen if the sacrifice isn't presented."

"That's way too conceited! After the princess is gone, won't someone else just take her place?"

As Aleist said that, Emilio's expression turned serious.

"... The one selected as sacrifice has to be a woman of appropriate age. They can't be too young or too old. Right now... the only candidate is Cleo."

Emilio seemed hard pressed to sat it. Hearing that, Nate's expression turned somewhat grim.

"There's definitely something wrong with the organization of a country that can't even secure a backup, but personally speaking, I do feel a little sorry."

Aleist recalled how the blue-haired Nate had been mistaken as someone concerned on the main road. She had denied it herself, but was she perhaps related?

He thought.

"A-anyways! My condition for helping is making it so there won't be casualties! I won't let up on that!"

At Aleist's words, Emilio offered some cynicism.

"Not even the unit from Gaia, and those that get in our way? No casualties at all is impossible."

"T-that's..."

Losing his momentum, Aleist looked at Emilio's expression.

(He laughed?)

It looked just a little sad, but it was a smile that had a tint of joy.

"Well, black knight, was it? I want to borrow your strength, so I'll try to keep casualties to a minimum. Oh, that's right... I do know some people who might help out."

Aleist tilted his head.

Extra: Songstress 10

Cleo lay on the bed in her room.

Night had come, but even if she tried to, she couldn't sleep.

The one who called over to her at that time was Millia.

"Um, how should I put it..."

Having heard the circumstances, she had learned of the truth that the maid Cleo thought of as a friend had betrayed.

For that sake, she tried to be tactful towards Cleo.

"... I appreciate your thoughts towards me. But it's alright. I will be participating in tomorrow's ceremony, after all."

"S-so... if you're alright with me, I wouldn't mind being your fri—"

Millia's proposal received an immediate response.

"Please stop right there! Don't say something like that..."

Millia was silenced.

(I'm sure she must think I'm a terrible woman. But even if I make a friend right before I die, I'm...)

To Cleo, failure couldn't be permitted in the next ritual.

He had her obligation as a daughter of the royal house, and she had been told all her life to fulfill her duty.

(I... even so, I must do my duty.)

Cleo endured her tears as she waited for the sun to rise.



The dungeon beneath the castle...

Before night gave way to dawn.

A party of three with black robes over their bodies.

Those three with their hoods pulled deep down came into contact with the three sleeping in one of the cells.

“Oy, you lot.”

“What is it now? We just followed our orders and~.”

The one who called out to the half-asleep faces of Ben, Pono and Passan was Emilio.

Aleist stayed on high alert as he complained.

“Is this place really supposed to be that easy to infiltrate?”

As he said that, Nate sounded fed-up.

“You’re the amazing one, senpai. Entering a shadow to move... just having the combat prowess to stand against Gaia’s mechanized unit is amazing enough.”

From Aleist’s point of view, being complimented like that only made him tilt his head.

Of all else, he was surrounded by people much more amazing.

With all the trouble he went through in his student days, he would often wonder if his abilities were even high at all.

The individuals he had met up to that point, from Aleist’s eyes, they were all cheat-class characters.

“You think? When I look at Rudel and the others, I can’t help but feel I fall short. Though I have put in some effort.”

“... The very fact you can even compare yourself to those crazies puts you at a considerably high level, senpai.”

While the two of them conversed, Emilio negotiated with the three.

“S-so you had a reason like that!”

“Captain, let us help out! I don’t want to stay useless like this.”

“I don’t want that either. I feel sorry for the princess.”

As Aleist hadn’t been listening in to what they were saying, he tried asking Emilio as the man used the key to free them.

“What exactly did you tell them to smooth it over?”

On those words, Emilio's face turned just a little serious.

But his expression immediately crumbled.

“Nothing more than the truth. These guys are good folk at heart. So they're easy to deceive.”

“You deceived them!?”

Quietly exclaiming to Emilio, Aleist looked at the three shedding tears as they left their cell.

Returning his eyes to Emilio once more, he was laughing a bit.

It wasn't an unpleasant smile. It was one of true delight.

“... I intended to let them out regardless. But while we're at it, might as well get their help.”

“In the end, what do you want to do? Saying you don't care, then helping these three.”

Aleist tried weighing out Emilio.

“It's probably true that he wants to save that princess called Cleo. And they do call him boss.”

Emilio was Cleo's real brother.

Meaning he was a prince of this country.

But his father Barquah devised a plan to send his own country to ruin.

The ringleader behind the princess' attack was the king.

(This is way too complicated. Shouldn't it be a bit more... aaarrggh!!)

Dismayed, Aleist watched the form of Emilio issue orders to the three.

By Emilio's plan, they would carefully cause explosions and fires across the palace and town to evacuate its residents.

By Barquah's plan, the king would crush all home, and as the people were panicking left and right, he would use the ancient weapon to destroy the castle town.

But normally, it would be strange for the influential people of the country to go along with such a plan.

(A war against an ancient weapon... that event was never in the game.)

Even if he knew this world wasn't a game, he would still find himself taking these things as events.

Aleist shook his head to the side to change his train of thought.

(I have to stop them. The King of Celestia's plan, and the ancient weapon.)

For that sake, Nate had set up contraptions across town.

Mechanisms to produce smoke, to raise ruckuses around and direct people towards evacuation.

"Alright, here are your orders. If any explosions break out at the castle, you're to rouse all the folks in the barracks and have them help evacuate the residents. Here's the official decree."

Emilio took out the document he had brought and handed it over to the leader Ben.

Accepting it, Ben took a nervous look over it.

"C-captain, is it really alright for me to hold something like this?"

As the unshaven man trembled, Emilio dropped the bomb.

"Don't worry... it's fake."

"Fake!!?"

On Pono's surprise, Emilio cautioned him to keep quiet.

"We've made arrangement for smoke to rise all over the place. You are to prioritize evacuating the citizenry, and once that's done, your job is to protect them. It's a vital role... you can do it, right?"

There was no doubt it was an important job.

Hearing that, the three nodded with serious expressions. Emilio gave a warm smile, handing over their equipment he had brought along.

"When you're done changing, keep a low profile until you hear the

explosions. You need only take advantage of the confusion to move as planned. Make sure you properly carry out your orders.”

“Leave it to us, captain!”

“We’re finally starting to look like a unit!”

“And the captain is actually relying on us!”

Once the three started changing, Aleist checked over the scheduled time with Nate.

“It should be happening soon, right?”

“Yes. Right about...”

At that instant.

The sound of an explosion rung through the castle walls. Hearing that, everyone’s expression turned to surprise.

“What is the meaning of this!?”

As Emilio drew close to Nate, the party-of-three looked around nervously. Aleist was the same, but he calmly looked at Nate.

“The scale of that explosion was strange... it’s not the one I set.”

Hearing that, Aleist did hit on something.

(... The ones specialized for this sort of thing, if I recall correctly...)



Izumi exchanged slashes with a black-robed assembly in a palace corridor.

Her drawn katana cut at the mechanical soldiers before her eyes.

On her horizontal swipe, her foe leapt back to take distance. But seeing the cracks spread down his arm he had guarded, the machine man’s wariness instantly spiked.

Behind Izumi, there were knights and soldiers of Celestia as well.

“... Judging by the uniform, you’re a High Knight of Courtois.”

The mechanical soldiers lowered their hips and came at her at once in a

coordinated assault.

“Kuh!”

Izumi sent out shockwaves, but perhaps she was dealing with elites, as even if she managed a cut, they avoided anything fatal. As she drew her sword back in, she cut the enemy fast-approaching before her eyes.

But the sensation she got wasn't that of human flesh.

“So these are the mechanized men Rudel was talking about.”

Izumi looked around to see a number of Celestian soldiers and knights were on the ground. In that space, a number of enemies had slipped through.

But Izumi didn't move.

Because in order to confine her, a few enemies had remained.

“H-High Knight! Just what could-”

A Celestian knight asked in dismay, but all Izumi knew was the fact her opponents were soldiers of Gaia.

“We are dealing with a unit from the Gaia Empire. Be careful... they're elites.”

As Izumi took a stance, her foe did the same.

Of course, the enemy's main objective was to buy time. They wouldn't force themselves to go on the offense.

On top of the presence of enemy and ally forces around her, the narrow corridor made it difficult for Izumi to move around.

(How shameful... to think I would be this useless in a real battle.)

Deeply vexed, Izumi stepped in and cut.

Her opponent leapt back and used a projectile.

While she hit it aside with her blade, another enemy used a similar means to attack the Celestian knights.

The concealed arrow pierced in, and yet another knight was down.

“Don't force yourselves to go up front!”

“W-when a woman is taking a lead, you think the knights can stand down!?”

Even on Izumi’s warning, the knights didn’t step back. But a majority of them were only equipped with their swords.

They were attacked in their sleep, a majority of them were forced to leap out without any decent equipment.

(Our defense is too fragile. Why is it so... we were already attacked once, shouldn’t we be on high alert?)

On the unsightliness of Celestia’s correspondence, Izumi couldn’t help but feel something contrived.



On a balcony overlooking the mountain the ancient weapon was sealed, Barquah listened to the surrounding turmoil alone.

Riding the wind, a burnt stench reached him.

“We’ve got some boorish visitors among us. What say you... Emilio.”

To where he turned, three robed figures stood.

It was Emilio, Aleist and Nate.

“Boorish? Is this not precisely the sort of chaos you wished for?”

Emilio glared at Barquah. While the king received a glance imbued with such hatred, upon seeing it, he burst into laughter.

“What a comforting glance indeed! That hatred of yours, it gives me the purest confirmation my revenge has succeeded.”

Seeing Barquah laugh, Aleist took a step forward and took a stance.

“What are you talking about... doing something like this for petty revenge, are you crazy!?”

Hearing Aleist’s words, Barquah scoffed.

“I don’t know who you might be, but you sound quite eager to stick your mouth into another’s household affairs.”

“H-household affairs? When you’re making a mess of your country, you call it

household affairs?”

Aleist drew his sword, and Nate took out her weapons as well.

Emilio slowly pulled his saber.

“The country is of no importance to me. This is simple revenge. My wife died in the place of the woman who birthed that good-for-nothing! And after fleeing her own duty, the woman who abandoned her own sister to die, dropped dead in some ditch! Because of that, my wife was...”

Aleist’s failure to understand set him bewildered.

Having noticed that, Barquah knew it was the end, so he began talking from his heart.

“Twin sisters of the clan were sent to me. I was to marry one of them and bring up children with both. It is the job of the royal house. That’s all my marriage would be... so I thought.”

The hilt of the saber Emilio gripped let off a grating sound.

“... You abandoned my and Cleo’s mother, dammit!”

While he heard it, Barquah thought nothing of it as he continued his explanation.

“Yes, but the one I loved was the other. My conversations with her, can you imagine the solace they offered me... I fell so deeply in love I didn’t know what to do with myself.”

Barquah looked at the view of the castle town he could see from the balcony. And at that blazing scene, he directed a smile.

“How truly wonderful. The sight of the people who raised an uproar for me to offer my wife in the place of the woman who ran away, the sight of them falling to hell truly clears the heart.”

“T-this man... is mad.”

On Aleist’s words, Barquah turned and glared at the three.

“That’s right! This country maddened me! The system of this country is what’s cornered me to such an extent.”

With a step forward in her mask, Nate asked Barquah.

“Did you need to go so far to get your revenge? Then shouldn’t there have been a much more efficient way to go about it?”

Barquah let a low-brow smile cross his face.

“I thought I would have that woman’s son and daughter see hell as they lived on. It was the greatest farce! The faithful, foolish daughter who lived to carry out her duty. Driven out of the palace, the foolish son living a filthy life in the slums! It truly was a comforting scene to watch!”

Having lived solely for revenge, it seemed not a fragment of his feelings as a father remained.

Seeing that, Emilio grit his teeth.

“So you knew everything?”

Barquah answered his question with a refreshing smile.

“That’s right. I watched in pleasure as you crawled your way up. Knowing you would start something, at the end of the end, your hopes would spill from your hands... that was the instant I wanted to see. Of course, Cleo’s miserable state was also a sight to behold. She resembled that woman so closely, I hated and hated her more than I could bear.”

The root of this malice... this series of events, Barquah had been pulling the strings of them all.

Once they figured out that was the case, Emilio and Aleist’s expressions dyed in hatred.

Barquah’s smile took a turn for the supreme.

“That’s right... hate me. My hatred is far greater than that!”

Aleist spoke to him.

“You’re crazy... do you hate everything around you so badly!?”

Barquah spread his arms out, turning to the three as he spoke.

“... A love that doesn’t drive one to madness on its loss isn’t true love at all, my boy.”

The next instant.

The mountain that could be seen at the end of the balcony erupted.

It was an explosion that even shook the castle, but in contrast to its scale, the magma that rose from it was scarce. Seeing that, Aleist noticed something was off.

“W-what’s this!?”

In the dark night sky, a number of red light rose from the castle town.

With the volcano’s eruption, magma had begun to spout.

From within it, it looked as if a giant something was trying to crawl its way out of the mountain.

“So why don’t we change the schedule? It would be boring to leave this country’s final act to that boorish lot. Don’t you think finishing it by my hand would be a happier ending?”

As Barquah said that, the giant something’s single eye gleamed as it began making its way towards them.

Nate cried out.

“It can’t be, it’s really moving!”

Emilio quietly walked up and raised his saber. Seeing that, Barquah laughed.

“It’s a pity I won’t see this country’s end, but I’ll be heading to the side of my beloved. I’ve kept her waiting quite a long while... I love you, —-”

His body was cut through, his blood fluttered through the air. As he leisurely gazed over that scene, he collided with the handrail, and his body took a fall.

An upside-down Barquah watched over the castle town wrapped in fire as he fell.

“Now here is where hell begins.”

The moment he fell. And even after he collided, Barquah’s face was smiling.



Led off by Millia, Cleo ran down the corridor jumbled with enemy and ally.

Assailed by an intense tremor along the way, they headed outside through a shattered windowpane.

The scenery that awaited them was certainly hell.

“It can’t be... the castle town is...”

“This is terrible.”

Cleo touched both hands to her mouth, shaking.

Millia looked at the scenery and muttered.

The flames blazed up as a giant something set course towards them.

As the morning sun slowly rose from beyond the mountain, its form gradually grew vivid.

“I-it’s that thing we saw at the souvenir shop.”

As Millia said that, Cleo crouched on the spot.

There, a group of a few appeared before her.

“We’ve finally found you. I never thought the ancient weapon would start up... but that body of yours is to become research material for the empire. We will make you useful, Princess Cleo.”

A man whose three red eyes let off an ominous light...

The captain of the mechanized unit held a sword in each hand.

Millia came out front and poised her bow, but the man’s movements were different from what she saw in the alley.

“Wha!”

Instantly circling around, those three red eyes became tails of red light. Looking where he ended up, he had circled around to Millia’s right side.

His remaining subordinates came at Millia.

“It doesn’t matter if you kill the guard. For the princess as well, an arm or a leg is—”

The three-eyed man said as he lifted his sword, only for Rudel to arrive at the scene.

As magic in the shape of blades of light pierced into the floor, the men jumped back at once.

“You’re late, Rudel!”

Landing then and there, Rudel pulled his sword and readied the shield of his left hand.

Wearing his white armor, Rudel spoke to Millia.

“I’m sorry. I ran into some troublesome ones along the way.”

As he said that, Rudel used his shield to bash aside the mechanized soldier coming at him.

Glowing shields manifested around, floating and gathering around Cleo.

“Eh, this is...”

As Cleo remained unable to comprehend the surrounding situation, once more, an ally appeared on the spot.

As a black shadow was cast onto the ground, three figures emerged from it.

“I-it’s Rudel after all... and wait, carrying two people in that thing is harsh...”

Aleist tossed his robe aside. He was wearing armor under it.

“We were right to load it into Sakuya-chan’s bags. Right, senpai?”

Nate handed over his helmet and Aleist pulled it down on his head.

“So you guys came too. By the way... I feel like I recognize your companion.”

As Rudel said that, Emilio looked at Cleo.

“Cleo!”

“E-Emilio...”

Cleo began taking distance from him.

Extra: Songstress 11

Rudel wore his white armor over his body, Aleist was clad in his black.

The white and black knights stood side by side in the Celestia Castle courtyard.

Fires were rising across the castle town and the townsfolk had begun their evacuation.

Izumi darted out for more freedom in combat and looked around.

“And now I’m surrounded.”

The mechanized unit of the Gaia Empire.

An elite unit thrown into dark, backroom missions, it was made up of those whose bodies were mainly mechanical.

The three red eyed man who commanded that elite force held a barbed sword in each hand.

A tail protruded from his robe. Freely moving it around, he looked amused as he looked their way.

Across his visor, Rudel spoke to Izumi.

“Aleist and I will handle this. Izumi, Millia, go protect the princess. You too, Na... masked woman I do not know.”

Both Rudel and Aleist lowered their hips and readied their weapons.

Those around kept wary of their every move.

As Izumi remained wary of Emilio, Nate in her mask explained.

“It’s alright. Please think of him as an ally. As long as it comes to protecting Cleo-san, he is our comrade in arms.”

Aleist also spoke to Rudel.

“That’s how it is, so while I’m sure you’ve got a lot going on, for now we have to work together... there are too many enemies.”

Around then, the enemy mechanized unit continued to shuffle and gather.

Why were so many able to slip in?

As he thought that, Rudel—

“How long has it been since we fought together?”

“Not since we met Sakuya? I get the feeling it’s been a real long time... I only really remember getting into slugfests with you.”

As the two of them started an out-of-place conversation, a number of the mechanized unit came at them.

The one who called them to a stop was the three-eyed man.

“Stand down!”

Rudel had smacked one to the side with his shield, while Aleist had used the long-hilted swords he held in both hands to stop the attack of another.

And once the enemy Aleist pinned down was cut down by Rudel, Aleist’s hands were free, and his unoccupied left-hand sword pierced into another foe.

A reddish black oil spouted as the two enemy soldiers were flung away.

The enemy soldier Rudel had bashed didn’t move after he collided with a wall.

Rudel spoke.

“Head to where Sakuya is. If she moves, the castle will crumble.”

The reason Sakuya hadn’t come to their aid was because the castle interior was still a jumble of enemy and ally. If she made any wrong moves, she would end up injuring allies.

But if they could make it to Sakuya, they’d be safe.

“Her clumsiness is inconvenient at times like this.”

And Rudel,

“But that’s what makes her so cute”

The three-eyed man issued orders to his men.

“Cut at them with the resolve to become sacrifices for the cause. The white

and black knight... take their heads, and glory shall follow for eternity! It will be a severe loss to Courtois!”

As the surrounding soldiers made for Rudel, Izumi took Cleo’s hand and ran off.

“You two better survive!”

As the two of them raced off towards the enemy, whether Izumi’s voice even reached or not...

Millia ran watching their back, while Nate and Emilio took the vanguard.



Under his helmet, Rudel moved his eyes.

As he fell back to avoid the spear thrust from his right of a mechanized soldier, he turned and beat them down with his left-hand shield.

For the enemies that tried cutting at his now-empty back, a number of black stakes protruded from his shadow to skewer them.

Aleist was using both his hands to parry foes, and a number of enemies rushed at his back as well.

Concentrating to produce shields, the leaping soldiers collided with them and fell to the ground.

Rudel turned to the enemies coming at them one after the next, muttering under his helmet.

“This is a pain.”

Using his sword to sweep back surrounding foe, he moved to stand back to back with Aleist.

Because of the enemies scattering reddish-black liquid around, the smell of oil was much harsher than that of blood.

Aleist, his breath a little disturbed,

“There are too many of them. Rather...”

“Right.”

The oil spreading across the ground restrained their use of magic.

Looking around, the three-eyed man was nowhere to be found.

Aleist sighed.

“Give it some time, and this place will blow sky high.”

“I don’t think it’s something to laugh at, but that’s something I’d rather avoid.”

Would the oil on the ground ignite?

That was their worry.

This was especially troublesome with Rudel’s high magic output. If the blaze spread, they would instantly find themselves fighting through a sea of flames.

“This is getting harsh, but... three-eyes is gone.”

As Aleist cut down the foe coming at him, he spoke to Rudel.

“Who’s going to go?”

Hearing Aleist’s serious voice, Rudel thought just a bit.

(They’re no weaklings, but if Aleist is wary of the man... will it be difficult for Izumi and the others?)

Rudel highly evaluated Izumi’s abilities.

But he couldn’t ignore Aleist’s decision.

“Got it. I’ll handle this place. I’m good at drawing attention.”

In his white armor, Rudel was extremely conspicuous at night.

“But it’ll be troublesome to break out of this encirclement. That Celestial King definitely had a hand in this. To the very end, he’s the worst.”

A large number of enemy soldiers still remained around.

(Good grief, where are they coming from? That aside, it sounds like Aleist knows something, but for now...)

In order to let Aleist slip out, Rudel performed a grand cut at the enemy.

“Once you reach Sakuya, flee into the sky. They won’t be able to follow you

there... go!”

The two who ran off in different directions.

Rudel accelerated, cutting down one enemy soldier after the next. Perhaps they didn’t feel pain, as the enemy came at them without fear.

(They really are troublesome foes!)

As he accelerated with wind magic, the oil scattered and stuck to everything around.

Nearby, as if to observe him, Rudel spotted a single soldier on the wall.

(Is it about time they used it?)

As he thought that, the soldier took out something like a pipe and made a motion of igniting it. Once the pipe-like item breathed fire, he tossed it straight at Rudel.



While Izumi’s group ran down the palace corridor, they found the three-eyed man waiting for them.

Running to the front, Emilio glared at the man.

“That was the shortest possible route. Why are you here!”

The laughing three-eyed man opened his robe a bit to show off his legs. There were small wheels attached, alongside ominous spikes.

“Even if I take a detour, as long as I’m faster, it is possible to catch up. What’s more, your side is moving while guarding our precious test subject.”

Emilio took a stance with his saber, Nate readied her knife.

Millia fired an arrow into the three-eyed man’s shoulder.

“No way...”

She reeled back.

The man let out a mechanical laugh, pulling out the arrow and crushing it in his hand as he spoke.

“I’m sure it will be meaningless before the white and black knights, but a

majority of this body is a mass of iron. An arrow with just a bit of magic put in is pointless. Now won't you hand over our test subject?"

Cleo was necessary to manipulate the ancient weapon, the three-eyed man recognized that.

Izumi called out to the two up front, letting go of Cleo's hand to grip her hilt and take an iai stance.

"Dodge to the side!"

Nate swiftly reacted, Emilio opened the passage a little late. And as Izumi drew her katana, a shockwave broke out, and the three-eyed man—

Izumi's eyes instantly turned to the ceiling.

Like a reptile, the man stuck both arms and legs to the ceiling surface, immediately extending his tail to attack her.

While Izumi hit the attack aside with her scabbard, the tail went right on to wrap around Cleo.

"N-nooo!!"

As it lifted up a screaming Cleo, the tail was cut through by Emilio's saber.

Millia embraced the falling girl, while Izumi hammered another slash into the three-eyed man.

When he landed right in the center of the group, Nate took a swipe at him, but he locked her down with a sword.

"You Courtois dogs... would do best just to cower in the shadows of your dragons!"

The man discarded his tail, only for another tail to shoot out of his robe.

Not to capture Cleo, this was a blow filled with killing intent.

"If the subject is to be taken by Courtois, then I'd rather!"

The three-eyed man said with a laugh, and Cleo was unable to move from surprise. Millia tried to yank her aside.

Izumi tried to cut at the tail, but...

(I won't make it in time!)

There, Emilio leapt out in front of the tail and cut it down with his saber. The sword broke in two, and the tail's pointed end stabbed deeply into his body.

"Emilio... why?"

Cleo was still immobile; the three-eyed man tried to retreat back.

"Blasted traitor!"

But Nate tripped him up, and as he collapsed onto the ground, she immediately thrust her knife right into the vicinity of his neck.

That attack she had carefully aimed at the armoring's joint stuck deeply into his throat.

Showered in a reddish black oil, Nate spoke.

"... This really is the worst."

After delivering the finishing blow, she stood and raced over to Emilio.

Izumi was taken aback, but she immediately poised herself to guard them.

The collapsed Emilio gripped Cleo's hand. And then and there, Emilio decided he would convey his message to Cleo.

"Emilio... I am set to die shortly. Why would you..."

Perhaps with too much to say, Cleo's words couldn't come out. Spitting blood from his mouth, Emilio smiled a bit.

And he opened his mouth.

Millia stopped him.

"Don't speak! We have to start your treatment at..."

There, Nate held Millia back and shook her head.

"This is the end of the line. Please give them some time to speak."

Emilio offered Nate his gratitude.

"T-thank you. Cleo..."

"Yes."

“I’m... I’m your real brother. Mother took me when she left the castle.”

Perhaps listening with conflicting emotions, Cleo’s gaze shifted. But Emilio continued on.

“Life was filled with troubles. But I had mother with me and it was fun. I heard I had a little sister...”

Emilio took a silver, egg-shaped necklace from his clothe pocked and entrusted it to Cleo. On it, the insignia of the royal house was engraved.

“This is...”

“You have a gold pendant, don’t you? That one belonged to our aunt... can you hand this one to Aleist... the black knight as his payment? You don’t need two exchange stones, do you?”

Exchange stone... a force that moved the ancient weapon, and by paying a price, a stone that could grant a proportional reward.

Of course, Emilio didn’t seem to understand what basis it worked on.

“U-umm...”

After spitting up blood, Emilio’s breathing grew rough as he spoke.

“There are loads I wanted to tell you. But there’s no time. Our mother loved you, and aunty did too. That man... when father told mother she was going to die, he was considerably troubled. We wanted to take you when we ran, but... hac!”

Before Emilio’s bloodened mouth, Cleo shed tears.

“Emilio... my brother.”

Called brother, Emilio made a delighted face.

“Thanks for that. Now I can make a proper report to mother. No, I guess I’m off to hell, so that’s not happening.”

Smiling, Emilio placed a hand on Cleo’s face.

“Cleo... mother and me, we both love you. When you were announced as the next sacrifice, mother was crying. She could no longer move her disease-weakened body, but she said time and again she wanted to meet you... she

wanted to apologize. So I'll say it. I'm sorry. Please forgive her."

Without letting out a voice, Cleo nodded. She nodded and nodded, and Emilio spoke up.

"... Thank god. Leave the rest to Aleist..."

Emilio's body ceased with those words, Cleo hung over him and shed tears.

Izumi readied her katana.

"Who is it!?"

The one who ran over was Aleist in his black knight armor.

He looked at the collapsed Emilio. He took off his helmet and raced over to the body.

"W-why! What happened!?"

The one who spoke coldly to a fidgety Aleist was Nate.

"We don't have any time. Senpai, where's Rudel-senpai?"

"He's buying time! We have to get that man to a doctor!"

"It's too late for that. It's already over... now, let's go. There's no telling when an enemy will come."

Nate took Cleo's hand.

Cleo...

"Why... if I just died, it would all have worked out."

When she said that, Aleist struck her with his left hand. Collapsing onto the floor, Cleo gazed up at Aleist in wonder.

"That man! Emilio wanted to save you! He continued to fight all on his own! And over his corpse, over all his effort... don't say you want to die."

To a teary Aleist, Nate spoke.

"Senpai. If you don't want to waste Emilio-san's will, for now,"

"I know!"

Aleist wiped his tears as he walked off, Cleo gazed at his back.

Izumi extended a hand to Cleo. Millia as well.

“... I don't know what I should say at a time like this. But if we keep dawdling here, it surely won't make Emilio-dono happy.”

“Now let's go.”

Taking both their hands to stand, Cleo walked, turning back a few times to look at Emilio's smile.

Extra: Songstress 12

Arriving at Sakuya, Izumi boarded her back.

Around were the fragments of earthen dolls, and flattened soldiers of the mechanized unit.

Once everyone had gotten on her back, Sakuya took to the sky.

‘What are we supposed to do after we’re in the air?’

To the voice, Izumi.

“Head towards Rudel. But I recommend against helping it out...”

Where Sakuya was had become a mountain of rubble. Each minuscule move of the dragon would destroy surrounding buildings, and if she rampaged for real, Celestia Castle would quickly be leveled to the ground.

Izumi thought.

(So not even a dragon could beat the ancient weapon?) Brushing aside her hair disheveled by the wind, Izumi looked at the castle down from Sakuya’s rising back.

A blazing smoke rose from a number of places.

The black of night was lit with an ominous light, as the giant quadrupedal ancient weapon slowly crashed into Celestia’s defensive wall.

And...

“The hell’s that...”

As Aleist leaned his body in, the ancient weapon’s single eye spouted fire, melting down the surrounding walls and buildings.

Its whole body illuminated by the inferno it spewed, it really did look just like the ornaments sold at the souvenir shops.

Unlike those easy-to-break articles, however, the ancient weapon showed no sign of stopping as it made straight for the palace.

Its movements were dull, the evacuating citizenry fled in the opposite direction of the weapon.

Seeing the sights from the air, Cleo,

“... Please take me to the guardian deity.”

As she said that with a serious face, Millia returned fire.

“Why!? If you go to a place like that, your life—”

“Even so! If you can’t get too close, then just as close as you can! This is an order from a princess of Celestia! ... I can’t cause any further trouble.”

To Cleo who leaked a sob with those words, Aleist spoke.

“You’re saying it again... don’t you think you’re besmirching Emilio!?”

“I’m fully aware I am! But it cannot be helped. This is all I’m capable of. I was born and raised for this sake. Telling me to live a different life at this point... take me to that guardian deity this instant!”

With a face of pure earnesty, she shed tears as she spoke.

There, not from the direction of Sakuya’s flight, a different gust blew through.

Rudel skillfully landed on Sakuya’s back, removing his helmet to speak.

“Unfortunately, the orders I received were to ‘Guard you to the ceremonial alter’ tomorrow morning. I cannot follow your orders.”

‘Ah, Rudel.’

“Rudel, glad you’re alright.”

Sakuya rejoiced, Izumi was relieved. Izumi looked at the ancient weapon from Sakuya’s back.

Cleo spoke.

“It’s an order. I beg of you.”

“I refuse. I’m a knight of Courtois, after all. Oh, right, perhaps I should say this? I’m a member of the Dragoons, the strongest knights of Courtois. It’s an insult for the world to think we remained on a losing streak with this weapon forever. I shall be settling the score.”

Rudel looked at the ancient weapon and laughed.

Izumi touched her right hand to her face as she spoke.

“Rudel, show some prudence.”

“My apologies. But as long as we defeat that thing, it will all be over. My mission was, from start to finish, to safely deliver Cleo; I was never told not to obliterate any guardian deities or ancient weapons or whatever it is.”

Millia was amazed.

“They never said it! Sure enough, they never said it, but...!!”

Nate looked at Rudel and shook her head to the side.

“You haven’t changed from your student days, I see. For better or worse, that is.”

Aleist was looking at the earth.

“... The small ancient weapons are moving around. I’ll deal with those.”

As Aleist showed some motivation, Rudel smiled. The black knight’s face turned a little sorrowful.

“Rudel, I was Emilio’s friend... perhaps not, but I’m sad that he died. While I’m not going out for revenge, I could at least put in some effort ‘til it’s over.”

Understanding from the fact the man wasn’t there, Rudel kept it short.

“I see,”

He muttered. And he put down his helmet and turned to Aleist.

“I’ll stop that ancient weapon with Sakuya. I’ll try to lead the fight outside as much as possible, but there will be collateral damage. Can you take care of evacuation too?”

Aleist, likewise.

“Of course.”

Seeing the two of them meet fists, Cleo spoke.

“Why go so far... if only I become a sacrifice, no one has to be hurt.”

To that opinion, Izumi.

“It’s alright.”

“Eh?”

“Rudel’s all over the place, but he’s a man who’s true to his word. Up to now, and from here on... that’s the sort of man he is.”

Millia grumbled as she added on.

“I’ll be on the ground too. Aleist, you’d better give some decent orders.”

Aleist, a little nervous.

“L-leave it thoo me!”

He fumbled his words.

Nate uninterestedly muttered.

“Millia-senpai again? Just so you know, everyone’s going to hear about this when we get back. Well, it’s partly to protect myself, but... sharing information is the ironclad rule of the harem.”

Izumi thought.

(He’s got it rough, that Aleist.)

Rudel addressed Sakuya.

“Sakuya, land in an adequate place. After that... we’re going to be settling the score with that weapon.”

He sounded like he was having fun.

(If he didn’t have that side to him... if he was just a little settled...)

Izumi grumbled in mild delight.

Cleo stared at the dragoon attempting to challenge the impossible.



After landing on the ground and separating with Aleist’s group, Sakuya immediately took to the sky once more.

As the surroundings received a downward gust strong enough to put out the

flames, Aleist looked around.

“I’ll have Millia relay orders from a high point. Izumi-san will be fighting, so... Nate, you guard the princess.”

Nate breathed out a sigh.

“Well, with these members, that sounds about right. Now let’s be off.”

Cleo handed over the silver pendant to Aleist.

“Oh? And this is?”

“From Emilio to you. Perhaps Emilio thought of you as a friend as well.”

“I see... so I’ve lost a friend.”

As Aleist let out a sorrowful voice, Cleo spoke.

“No, Emilio... my brother was happy. I wasn’t able to do anything so you have my gratitude as well. It was made from an ore called an exchange stone. I heard something similar was used in the ancient weapon’s core.”

The hand Aleist used to grip the pendant shook.

(So it’s something that dangerous?)

Cleo told him about the stone.

“As the name implies, you can exchange something for a wish. A small price for a small wish, a large one for large... though you’re better off not using something like that.”

At Cleo’s powerless laugh, Aleist tucked the pendant away in his breast pocket.

“... I graciously accept it.”

“Thank you.”

Nate led Cleo off by the hand and evacuated her from the site.

Aleist drew a sword.

Nearby, dolls just like the ancient weapon, albeit smaller, were beginning to gather.

Izumi took her stance, offering Aleist some advice.

“Cutting them is pointless. Unless you smash them to pieces, they just regenerate.”

“Smash... huh.”

Aleist protruded a spear from his shadow, reshaping the tip into something like a hammer as he shattered one of them to bits.

“—That’s neat.”

Despite Izumi’s surprise, Aleist let out a sigh.

“If I couldn’t do this much, I’d be left in the dust. Now let’s go.”

Racing off, Aleist and Izumi went around smashing ancient weapons.



High in the sky, Rudel challenged the ancient weapon to battle with Sakuya by his side.

‘Jeeeeerrrk!!’

As Sakuya delivered a punch up front, its surface easily split.

But its insides weren’t empty...

‘Hooottt!!’

Sakuya instantly drew back her hand, a gush of boiling magma accompanying it.

By the regeneration of its surface armor, the weapon’s contents quickly came out of sight.

Rudel.

“What do you think you’re doing to my Sakuya!?”

Producing a large shield, he projected it in front of the single eye that had begun to gather light as they spoke.

Just as the shield appeared, a blaze streamed out, lighting everything around in a red.

Sakuya's hand wasn't badly injured.

A dragon that could get off just by complaining magma was hot was fearsome. But if they smacked their foe away here, magma would scatter about their surroundings.

(If we keep blowing it away until it runs out of innards, will it stop moving? No, if that's how it works, then surely the dragoons wouldn't have retreated...)

To Sakuya who was rubbing her right hand with her left, Rudel spoke.

"Sakuya, take to the sky."

'I hate this thing!'

Sakuya voiced her complaints in a child's voice as she rose into the sky.

Thinking it would be troublesome if they applied too much damage, Rudel considered his options.

(If we block off the roads, destroy the surface and control the flow of the magma...)

After he had thought that far through, the movements of the weapon turned strange.

"What is it now?"

'That thing, something's.'

Before Sakuya could say something was squirming inside it, the ancient weapon's surface began to crack.

Spouting magma, the armoring crumbled away bit by bit.

"What's this supposed to mean? Is it broken?"

'No, here it comes.'

As Sakuya rose, the fire from the weapon's split, round torso jetted out in her direction. Not by coincidence, they could feel an intent to attack.

"Kuh! Sakuya, Right!"

Sakuya veered right, but the flames gave chase.

"What is this?"

Just as before, Rudel manifested a large shield. But as the flames collided, the shield broke, and from within the flames, a mass of squirming magma showed itself.

The magma continued to burn a dark red as it took form.

A humanoid shape sprouting wings from its back, it took on quite a sinister shape.

“... Doesn’t look like a guardian deity to me.”

‘Not at all.’

Moving its large one eye, opening its mouth, the monster that emerged from the ancient dragon flew straight at Sakuya.

Rudel amassed a few hundred swords of light and shot them at the enemy.

Those small swords exploded as they stuck into the massive foe in quick succession, but only scattering magma, they didn’t seem to be very effective.

“So we should try destroying it all at once with massive firepower... but it’s surprisingly fast.”

As the monster chasing Sakuya opened its mouth, it fired a number of fireballs from it. Those attacks that followed closely as if each shot held its own will, Rudel crushed them by preparing shields. Looking down, they were distancing themselves from Celestia’s castle town.

“Now then, if we want to fight seriously, we’ll need to go a little further away.”

Searching for an adequate site for battle as he fled, Rudel turned to the beast letting out an uncanny roar.

“Don’t be so impatient. We’ll properly eliminate you.”

For some reason, he found himself saying.

Rudel found it a little perplexing why he said it himself.

‘Rudel?’

“No, it just felt as if it was crying out to be eliminated. Sakuya, are you up for it?”

‘Yeah!’

Sakuya seemed happy she was being relied on, and Rudel sent a warm smile.

Turning to look at the monster, it was once again about to fire attacks at them.

A mass of fire larger than any before it, it looked almost as if a large boulder had been clad in flames.

“... That one won’t end well.”

As he said that, Rudel held up his right hand.

Manifesting a large spear of light, he pierced through the boulder before it could be fired, raising a large explosion.

Magma scattered, falling onto the ground.

The monster’s upper body had been blown away, but magma quickly welled up from its lower half, regenerating it in the blink of an eye.

‘Uwah’

Sakuya reeled back.

“An ancient weapon... it seems we’ve met a worthy foe!”

While Rudel seemed delighted.

But be that as it may, he also thought over it with a level head.

(Now then, to prepare a large attack, we’ll need some distance and time, but that one doesn’t look like it’ll let us get away. If we close in, Sakuya will...)

Observing the enemy chasing them, Rudel simulated how he would fight with the beast.

Even if Sakuya might be able to blow it away in one attack, if the attack was directed thoughtlessly, some village or town may face casualty.

It would have to be something big enough to change the area’s geography.

And considerable time would be needed to store enough power.

They could close in and beating it down until there was nothing left, but the heat was harsh on Sakuya.

“How troublesome. I’m starting to see why my seniors called it a draw. But if we win here...”

‘Will Sakuya be praised?’

To the young child desperate for praise, Rudel nodded.

“You’ll undoubtedly be praised. Mystith-sama will be delighted!”

‘I’ll do my best!’

After saying that much, Rudel thought.

“Sakuya, can you produce water?”

‘No!’

“As I thought. I doubt I can make enough to stop that one.”

Rudel thought about using water to lower the magma’s heat and harden it.

But there was no meaning in small amounts.

(I’m sure a water dragon would have an affirmative advantage.)

Thinking he could never say that in front of Sakuya, Rudel reached that conclusion.

Extra: Songstress 13

Magma taken on the shape of man, a winged monster gave chase through the dark sky.

Receiving winds so strong the magic barrier couldn't suppress them, Rudel looked behind him.

"Sakuya, it's about time. Begin ascent!"

Rudel's plan was simple.

If the enemy was a monster of magma, he concluded they simply had to fight where there was water.

He led the monster along the night sky to distance it far from Celestia.

Sakuya's four wings swayed grandly.

She rose as large fireballs passed right beneath her.

As the monster closed its large mouth, Rudel looked at his foe's single large eye.

Under the eyelid as if the eye itself had been divided vertically, what looked to be an eye of flesh... it bore the eye of a lifeform.

Even when its body was made of magma, he questioned why it didn't burn.

'That thing's persistent!'

Sakuya complained at the enemy chasing her.

Rudel observed it with a serious face.

(If we want to take it out in a single blow, our best bet's to get into close combat and drop it into the ocean. How do we hit it down... explosions just blow away parts of its body, the rest isn't affected.)

Looking at the monster of magma, Rudel thought over how he might manage close combat.

Even with Sakuya's fists, their enemy was magma.

Her hands would stick into the monster's body, and Sakuya would be scalded.
But to get off with such little damage, dragons really were amazing after all.
Sakuya entered a cloud.

As his vision grew worse all at once, Rudel issued orders to Sakuya.

"Sakuya, break through the clouds!"

'Yeah.'

Sakuya shot straight up through the clouds.

But there, the monster was waiting for them.

'I hate this thiiiiing!!'

On Sakuya's directional change, Rudel leaned over and gripped the handrail off so as not to be thrown off.

As the scenery around him changed at a dazzling pace, he took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

"Just for a little while. Sakuya, take the wheel... head towards the ocean."

'On my own!?'

Hearing that voice on the brink of tears, Rudel opened his eyes and stomached his urge to throw out that idea.

Rudel's eyes were magic eyes.

As he closed his eyes, they gradually began to emit heat.

By flowing magic into them, he could imbue them with various effects.

While Sakuya hurried to flee, Rudel waited for his preparations to be readied.

A sudden rise, a sudden turn.

It was hell clinging on to not be thrown off.

(I should've used the belt.)

Repenting on his actions before he closed his eyes, he finished up preparations and opened them.

A red light dwelled in the pupils as he gazed at the monster.

“Kuh!”

Narrowing his eyes, he tried scanning the magma for the monster’s true form.

“What’s this... hundreds, thousands of people are crying out?”

Hundreds of human souls squirmed and struggled, imprisoned.

Captured by a stone in the monster’s chest, they struggled within the magma.

(Are those the sacrifices? And who’s that in the center of the stone?)

That soul in the shape of a woman looked at Rudel from within the stone.

His magic eyes focused and showed her form in vivid detail...

“She looks like Cleo... no, I guess it’s the opposite.”

He recalled the painting in the king’s room.

He remembered the painting with an unnatural space left in it. And the painting of the queen as well.

“The previous sacrifice was the queen, was it? Which means.”

All the captured, squirming souls were related to the royal house.

A prison of spirit even death couldn’t escape.

The monster was a kind of cage.

Rudel took a deep breath.

“... Sakuya, can you see that?”

‘If Rudel can see it, then Sakuya can see it too. We’re connected.’

To a proud Sakuya, Rudel,

“I see. Then you know what I want to say. Alongside the mission... we’ll be destroying that thing.”

Rudel touched Sakuya’s body with both his palms.

Feeling out Sakuya’s beat, he used his own magic to control it.

He still wasn’t accustomed to it, it felt all too unnatural, but this was no time for hesitation.

Glaring at the monster, Rudel...

“I’ll free you now.”

As he put that to mouth, a golden insignia surfaced over Sakuya’s body.

Rudel used his own magic to manipulate the mana flowing through her body. Under her four wings, a new gold-glowing smaller pair manifested.

A number of sharp sword blades protruded out of the now six-winged Sakuya’s tail.

As if covered in golden gauntlets, masses of energy manifested around her fists.

‘I’ll show you serious Sakuyaaa!!’

To intercept the monster, Sakuya held her position in the air.

Readying her two large fists, she took on a fighting pose.

As the monster opened its large mouth to produce fireballs, Sakuya opened her mouth as well. She usually gathered stones or fired breath attacks from it, but this one was different.

A number of water orbs formed around her mouth, before shooting right off towards the monster.

The fireballs the monster shot were taken down by water one after the next.

As water and magma collided, a water vapor broke out, rendering everything out of sight.

“It won’t go down the same as before.”

After saying that, Rudel called out to Sakuya.

“Go!”

‘Yeah!’

While she had been running away to that point, Sakuya started straight towards the monster.

Rudel’s magic eyes captured its sinister form.

Sharing Rudel’s vision, Sakuya slammed her fist into the beast.

The water hit first, and she aimed her attack into the portion that had hardened. The black lump on its surface shattered from the force, but the golden gauntlets had managed to capture the monster without piercing through.

Hurdling back, the monster regained its posture, moving its single eye left and right to search out the dragon's form.

Circling around beneath it with a nosedive, Sakuya went into a steep climb...

'Handed down from Mystith, taste the... what was it called again?'

Having forgotten the name, still oblivious, Sakuya got her large fist into the enemy's body.

The monster bent into an L shape, flying into the air upon receiving the impact.

And with speeds greater than before, Sakuya chased after it, putting both her fists together and lifting them above her head, she came right above the monster to lower them.

Seeing the monster fall towards the earth, Rudel spoke.

"... And that's that. I'll free you now."

Sakuya's gauntlets disappeared, she opened her mouth wide.

There a large mass of mana emerged and Rudel compressed it. Once the forcefully compressed lump of magic swelled again, it was compressed even further.

Drawing out a dragon's power... no, the power Sakuya originally possessed was Rudel's job.

Sakuya turned the mass of magic towards the monster that had fallen into the sea.

Water vapor rose all around, the writhing monster could no longer maintain its form.

It spread and spread, and spread some more.

It was almost as if a single large island was forming.

Sprouting countless hands, it opened its large mouth to cry out.

Water leaked from its large eye, making it look as if it were crying.

“Being sealed away forever, sealing others away, you must’ve hated it... so this is the end.”

Sakuya fired the compressed mass of magic.

Her body shot a bit back from the recoil, as her small light was sucked into the monster’s open mouth.

As she left that space, the golden markings disappeared from Sakuya’s body.

The color of Rudel’s eyes also returned to their usual blue.

Hurriedly fastening on his belt. Rudel clung to the handrail.

“It’s the first time we tried going all out.”

‘Sakuya did her best~.’

Hearing her tired voice, Rudel tried to open his mouth as he looked at the large pillar of light.

From the monster’s open mouth, magma erupted into the sky.

It was almost like an endless stream of lava.

As the shockwaves assailed Sakuya, it became difficult to fly properly, sending her barreling through the air.

“The output was too high.”

Perhaps it would be best not to use it again.

Rudel thought.

Gradually the pillar receded, and by that time, Sakuya had regained the ability to fly normally. Regaining her position, she commenced hovering on the spot as she looked at the monster.

‘It just keeps spreading.’

“Right.”

Where the monster had fallen, a black island was born.

The scene of it visibly expanding wasn't one he could witness all too often.

Rudel turned only to suddenly raise his right hand in front of his face.

The morning sun.

"So it's already morning."

'Sakuya is tired. I want to go to the hot spring.'

Rudel was of the same opinion.

"You're right. I'm also worn out this time."

After seeing the sun, Rudel turned to the island that continued to expand.

There, from within it, a large blue light in the shape of a human waved its hand. Below it, several hundred waved their hands at Sakuya.

Rudel rubbed his eyes, looking at the island again.

"... They're gone. Was the magic eye's effect still lingering?"

Just as he thought he'd seen a hallucination, Rudel pulled his sword and turned around.

Where he pointed it, a single woman watched the rising sun.

The blue-haired woman closing her eyes, she spread her arms out as if to bask in its light.

And...

'You have our thanks. Foreign knight.'

Seeing that smile, Rudel noticed it was the queen he had seen from the painting in the king's study.

And sheathing away his sword,

"It's dragoon. I'm a dragoon."

'Eh? You're a knight, aren't you?'

"Yes. But I'm more precisely a dragoon. I can't budge on that one."

The other party was successfully confused but as Rudel wouldn't concede that point, she gave a cute clearing of her throat as she started from square one.

Rudel made a satisfied face.

‘You have our thanks, foreign dragoon.’

“I was in the neighborhood on a mission. Call it a whimsy. Also.”

‘Also?’

“With this, I have proven the dragoons are the strongest. This is my victory, so in the end, that last draw has become the dragoons’ victory!”

Seeing Rudel’s delight, the blank stare of the transparent woman turned to a smile.

Her smiling face was reminiscent of Cleo.

‘What an interesting person. To think you’d defeat our guardian deity.’

“It looked more like a monster to me.”

As Rudel looked down at the island from Sakuya’s back, the woman leaned over to do the same.

Her feet weren’t there.

‘... It was twisted over the course of a history far too long. At first it was there to bring bounty to our country. Once it was used for war, its power was shown and it became a tool for battle.’

Rudel looked at the woman.

“You’re Cleo’s mother, aren’t you?”

There, the woman smiled and shook her head to the side.

‘I’m her aunt. That girl’s mother was my sister... I see, so Cleo is safe. That really is wonderful.’

Seeing the woman’s delighted smile, Rudel thought back to the unnatural painting in the king’s office. The person who was meant to occupy that space, surely it was Cleo’s real mother.

(... I guess every royal house has its complications.) The woman stood and looked at Rudel.

‘Thank you, dragoon. With this, Celestia’s guardian deity has been freed, and

we can return to the stream of souls.'

"I wholeheartedly accept your thanks. Of course, from the country's point of view, I might end up the villain."

'We should have never held a power so far beyond our means. I can see it in hindsight. It was an unnatural, twisted country. But even so, it's my sister and my homeland, so I think it'll recover.'

To the woman gradually becoming fainter, Rudel spoke.

"Anything you want me to pass on to Cleo or the other royals?"

The woman shook her head.

'Nothing personally... just tell them I'm watching over them.'

"Understood."

'And.'

Her face turning serious, the woman looked right at Rudel and spoke.

'... As I am now, I can understand. You'll be coming over to our side in the near future.'

"... Is that so."

With no further words from Rudel, the woman made a praying gesture.

'But please don't forget, you're not alone...'

Turning a smile to Rudel at the end, as the light of the sun grew stronger, she disappeared as if dissolving away.

Sakuya let out her voice.

'Rudel, who were you talking to?'

Rudel opened his mouth to explain it to her, closed it along the way, and smiled as he shook his head.

"No, it's nothing. Now once we get back, it's going to be busy."

Directing Sakuya to return, Rudel turned just once to look at the island that continued to expand.

Extra: Songstress Epilogue

From where a destroyed castle town spread out, Cleo looked over her surroundings.

The earthen dolls ceased function, rattling as they began to crumble apart.

Once the sun had fully shown itself, their movements grew strange, and just like that, they stopped moving.

Near Cleo, Nate took off her mask and looked around.

With a whistle from her lips, a hippogryph descended from the sky.

Seeing that, Cleo spoke.

“U-um,”

“Mn? Oh, that’s my partner, don’t worry about it. See, he can become a horse too.”

After landing, the hippogryph gave a shake of its eagle head and took on the form of a normal horse.

And breathing a sigh, Nate looked around.

“But this really will be a pain to report.”

“You’re... right.”

When they saw the red pillar pierce through the sky, that moment they felt the tremor and gale, both Cleo and Nate were surprised. But they could understand it now.

“Do you think Rudel-dono won?”

“I’d quite hope so. Because that would also mean the destruction of Celestia’s ancient weapon, or rather guardian deity... who’s going to take responsibility for this, I wonder.”

Cleo spoke.

“The guardian deity, is it. If I just...”

She had much to think about.

There, Nate cut in.

“... My ancestors, you see, they were once people of Celestia. This blue hair is something of a testament to that.”

“Eh?”

As Cleo looked on blankly, Nate...

“Meaning, I’m a survivor of your clan that ran away. Though at present, I’ve got work in Courtois as you can see.”

She kept on talking on the matter, but Cleo worried whether that might bring problems to her position. There, Nate’s expression turned serious.

“Well, I’m just trying to say that humans can live anywhere. Don’t you think it’d be alright if you just became free? If the threat of Celestia is gone, Courtois should give a public apology and provide some support.”

As Cleo hesitated, Nate spelled out her options.

“You could run off somewhere and live, not as a princess but a single young girl. All that’s left of the Celestia royal line is you and a few children. It’s possible to push it onto someone else.”

Cleo gave a bitter smile and shook her head.

She wouldn’t choose that option.

“Thank you. But I have my responsibilities and obligations. I could not become a sacrifice, but I cannot abandon my people. Someone will have to take the leading role. Even if it’s someone as unreliable as me.”

Nate spoke disinterestedly.

“Is that so.”

And putting on her mask, she pat her partner’s neck a few times. Cleo understood that Nate wasn’t particularly angry.

It felt like she already knew which one she would choose.

“I’m just a little envious of you.”

“Eh?”

At the end, Nate,

“That you could choose the option not to run, I’m just a little envious.”



A few days later.

In the ruins of Celestia, Sakuya moved around heavy loads as if playing with building blocks.

To help out in the reconstruction efforts, Rudel and Aleist worked dawn to dusk.

Izumi and Millia aided them.

Nate alone made for Courtois to report on the incident. Someone had to be told...

“To be totally honest, I think there’s something messed up about defeating a god and making an island of it.”

Holding a shovel, Aleist looked at Rudel.

“... Aleist, sure enough, I won’t deny I had some personal feelings involved. But there was no helping that one!”

Millia looked at the two of them tiredly.

“I understand it was a situation where it couldn’t be helped, but... who’s going to take responsibility for this?”

Neither Rudel nor Aleist could take responsibility.

Millia looked at Izumi...

“Isn’t this his surveillance inspector’s liability?”

A startled Izumi spoke.

“I do get the feeling there was nothing that could be done there.”

Izumi had hurriedly drafted up a report and handed it to Nate. But just how would the top brass evaluate it...

The four of them put some thought into it, but Rudel, “Well, whatever will be will be. Once I return, I’m sure I’ll be put to work in the outer reaches again, so I don’t mind if I’m to aid reconstruction a while longer.”

Aleist as well.

“You’re right. This feels so much more worthwhile than returning to cleaning duty. Now then, let’s give it our best for another day.”

Millia looked at the two.

“Isn’t it strange to use Courtois’ white and black knights like this? Normally, they should have some post or something, and work in the royal palace, right?”

Rudel and Aleist’s standings were dubious even in Courtois. When normally it wouldn’t be strange if they had much higher ranks, one was sent to the middle of nowhere. The other was treated as a cleaner.

Izumi sighed.

“Well, as long as the ones in question don’t raise a ruckus, isn’t it fine? If anyone’s got any complaints, they can voice them to the higherups.”

When he became a dragoon, Rudel knew he would be sent to the outer reaches as he had no complaints; while Aleist might grumble here and there, he was earnest in his work.

Yet the two of them had saved the country called Celestia.

No, perhaps saved was a misunderstanding.

Of all else, the one they fought was the guardian deity of Celestia.

One wrong move and people might say Courtois took advantage of their request to eliminate their deity.

Of course...

“But it’s a huge problem if a majority of their important ministers are gone.”

It was just as Rudel said.

Almost all of Celestia’s ministers and high officials had perished in the castle.

It was because of the mechanized unit, according to Nate.

There were various hands moving behind the scenes, and from Rudel's group's point of view, it was a peculiar mission that ended while they fought a battle they'd been roped into.

Sakuya looked up at the sky.

'Hey, can I eat that?'

She sought confirmation with Rudel, so he followed her eye line.

"The hippogryph? Someone's riding it, so you can't."

Sakuya was downhearted.



What the returned Nate informed them of was everyone's return.

At the same time, she told them, a squadron from Courtois had been dispatched with the intent to provide aid.

Rudel wanted to remain until they had built an extent of a basis. But he had to follow his orders.

He had asked Nate, but it seemed Celestia would officially be treated as Courtois' vassal state. This owed to the fact it didn't have any strengths worthy of forming an equal alliance.

And the new queen of Celestia, Cleo, was to have a discussion over it with the temporary ministers.

The damage was great, if they went against Courtois and could no longer receive aid, it was easy to imagine Celestia's reconstruction taking decades.

There was no guarantee Courtois wouldn't invade in that space.

"Did I do something unnecessary?"

Lying down in a room of the palace, Rudel muttered.

They would depart come the next day, so he took an early rest.

Once he returned, a report to Courtois' palace awaited him.

(I'm sure I'm causing them trouble again.)

Thinking he'd brought even more trouble to his superiors, Rudel closed his

eyes.

There, a knock at the door.

“Boss!”

The ones who entered were Ben, Pono and Passan, the party of three. As they had been promoted to knights, they now wore clothing that half-looked the part.

Cleo had appointed them as part of her royal guard.

Their achievements in evacuating citizens all the way to the end, and Cleo’s trust for them brought it about.

Of course, that was the public reason.

Truthfully, there was a severe lack of personnel, so things had grown lax in various places, and the three of them were appointed.

“What’s wrong? You want to train again?”

“No, today it’s work.”

“That’s right!”

“t’s work!”

As the three of them stuck out their chests, a single woman came out from behind them.

It was Cleo.

“Princess... or no, it’s Queen now I see.”

As Rudel left the bed and stood, Cleo turned him her tired face curled into a smile.

“Can I have just a little bit of your time?”

“Yes, I don’t mind.”



The party of three kept watch outside, while Rudel and Cleo went out to the balcony.

The night breeze had a nice feel to it.

“So why have you called me for?”

Cleo was taking deep breaths. And resolving herself, she looked at Rudel, wrung out her voice...

“Rudel-dono, no, Rudel-sama, I’ve fallen in love with you!”

She confessed.

Rudel spoke with a smile.

“I can’t!”

... He refused.

Upon hearing that, Cleo burst into laughter. Perhaps she knew the answer from the start.

“Can I ask for your reasons?”

Rudel spelled it out clearly.

“To start with, I have no freedom in my marriage. And even if I look like this, I’ve got quite a few restraints placed on me. I doubt the country will recognize a marriage between the two of us. If that’s how it’s going to be, I concluded I should decline it from the start.”

Cleo gave a bitter smile.

“You won’t give an answer in regards to my feelings, I see.”

“... I already have someone I love. Of course, for the same reasons, I can’t tell her I love her.”

Rudel got the feeling Cleo had become stronger than before.

“... In this incident. Celestia will put up a strong protest to Courtois for destroying our guardian deity. Of course, the country’s circumstance and the feelings of our people are conflicting, so that is simply the public stance. I am personally quite thankful, Rudel-dono.”

“So it’s going that way after all.”

As Rudel said that, Cleo...

“I truly am thankful. Celestia has finally gained the opportunity to stand on its

own power... I can think of it like that now.”

Cleo was surely troubled over many things, Rudel imagined.

And he surmised she had confessed to get her own feelings in order at the end.

“So have you gotten your feelings in order?”

“You noticed? Well let’s see... with this I can be not Cleo the princess, I can become the figurehead queen Cleo. I’ll leech as much aid from Courtois as possible.”

Rudel laughed.

“It’s quite troublesome if you say such things to me. Even like this, I’m one of Courtois’—”

Cleo said it before he could.

“Dragoons, after all. Right? ... You have my thanks. At the end, you even let me hear the words of my mother and aunt. That I was loved. I’ve been granted the opportunity to learn that, and I look on it with delight.”

Defeating the monster, Rudel had conveyed the words of the existence calling herself Cleo’s aunt to Cleo and the surviving royal children.

(Even so, she’s become quite strong in the past few days.) She had lost her brother Emilio, she had lost many things, and Rudel mulled over what he should say to her.

“You’ll be off early tomorrow morning, right? I shall see you off from here. Well then, farewell... Rudel.”

She dropped the honorific at the end.



The next day.

Looking at Sakuya take to the sky from the balcony, Cleo stroked aside her blue hair.

Around were the party of three and her servants, likewise looking at the dragon soar through the air.

“They’ve gone, boss and his friends.”

The party of three were shedding tears, while the servants pulled back from the sight of them.

To Cleo, those three were idiots but honest, and kind from their hearts. Precious knights to have.

Looking at Sakuya, Cleo sung a song.

(At the very least, even if only in song... thank you, foreign knights. Thank you, dragoon.)

Passan spoke.

“The princess’ songs really are the best!”

Ben,

“Fool, it’s queen now!”

Pono,

“Quiet down and let me hear the song!”

As Cleo’s song voice resounded through Celestia, the white dragon took a leisure circle around the palace. And the knights on its back waved their hands.

The party of three grandly waved back, and Cleo also answered in a wave.

(Thank you, Rudel. .And goodbye.)

Her smile still on her face, Cleo shed tears.